ON THE MEANING OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

V. S. SUKTHANKAR

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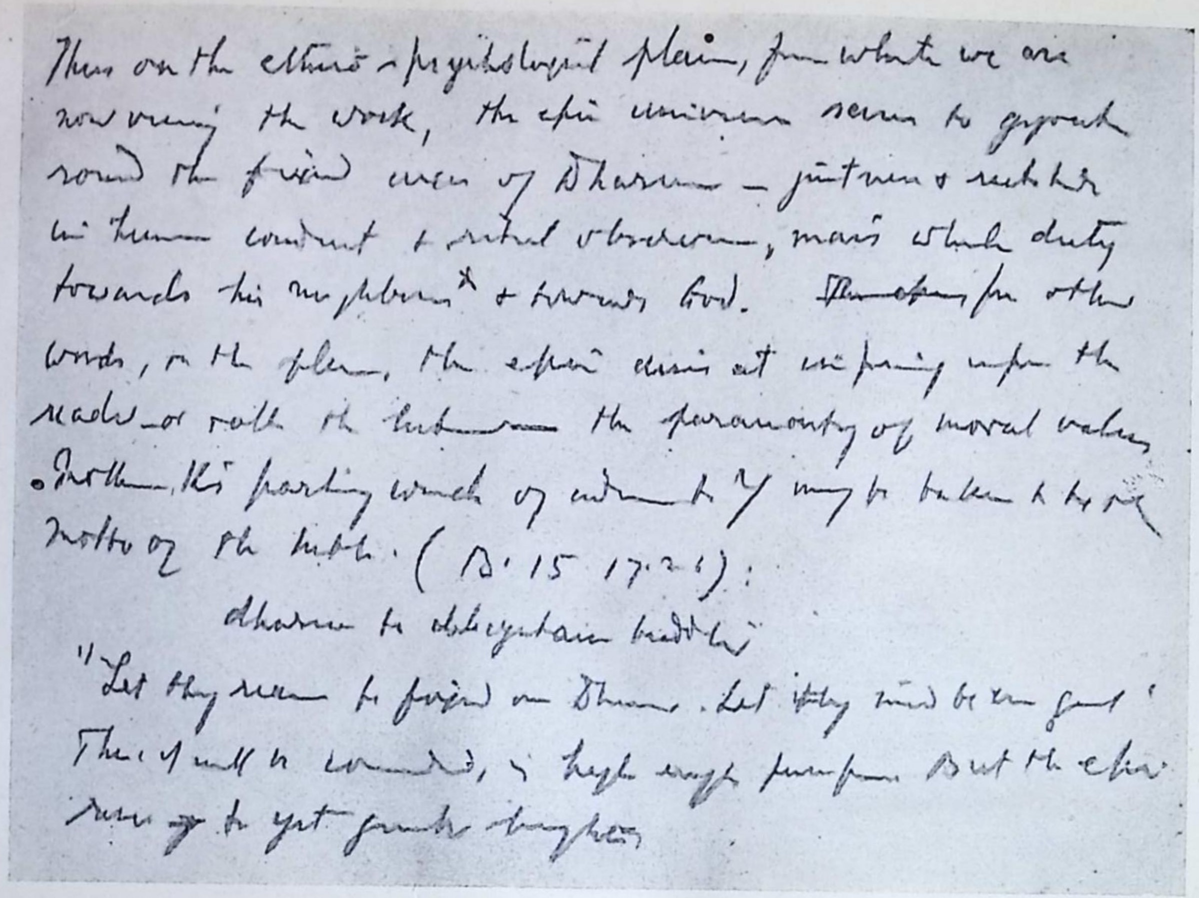
ON THE MEANING
OF
THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

SOCIETY'S MONOGRAPHS

I BUDDHAGHOṢA
By DR. B. C. LAW

II SOME JAIN CANONICAL SŪTRAS
By DR. B. C. LAW

III YOGA YĀJÑAVALKYA
By SHRI. P. C. DIVANJI



Thus on the ethico-psychological plane, from which we are now viewing the work, the epic universe seems to gyrate round the fixed centre of Dharma — justness & rectitude in human conduct & ritual observance, man's whole duty towards his neighbours* & towards God. [illegible] In other words, on the plane, the epic's [illegible] at impressing upon the reader — or rather the listener — the paramountcy of moral values. In [illegible] this parting words of advice to Y may be taken to be the motto of the Epic. (B. 15 17.21):

dharme te dhīyatāṃ buddhir

"Let thy reason be fixed on Dharma. Let thy mind be ever great."

This, it will be conceded, is higher [illegible] purpose. But the [illegible] [illegible] to yet greater [illegible]

Facsimile of the concluding portion of Chapter III in author's handwriting. [*see page 90*

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SOCIETY'S MONOGRAPH NO. IV

T. - C. PAREKH MEMORIAL FUND PUBLICATION NO. 1

ON THE MEANING
OF
THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

By

V. S. SUKTHANKAR, M.A., Ph.D.

THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
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OM

Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa

Asato mā sad gamaya/
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya/
mṛtyor mā amṛtam gamaya/

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I

It was in 1942 that the late Dr. V. S. Sukthankar delivered four lectures on the 'Meaning of the *Mahābhārata*' under the auspices of the University of Bombay. As a matter of fact, the fourth and last lecture was not delivered on account of his sad and sudden demise on the morning of the day fixed for it. The large number of people who went to the lecture-hall of the University that evening were shocked at the news; they converted themselves into a condolence meeting and paid their respects to the memory of this distinguished devotee of the Great Epic.

The Manuscript of these lectures — a veritable treasure to cherish —had remained lost to the world of scholars for the long period of fifteen years. It was in 1953 that I first requested my friend, Dr. B. G. Gokhale, formerly a colleague of mine at the St. Xavier's College, Bombay, and now Head of the Department of History in the Siddharth College, Bombay, to try to secure the Ms. for publication by the Society. Dr. Gokhale exercised his good offices as a result of which Shri L. V. Sukthankar, son of the late Dr. Sukthankar, offered the Ms. for publication as a monograph by the Society. The Society accepted the offer with sincere thanks to Shri L. V. Sukthankar as well as Dr. B. G. Gokhale and was happy to feel that the publication of the Ms. would remain a visible symbol of the long and intimate association of Dr. Sukthankar with it.

It was, however, not easy for the Society to spare enough funds for the publication of this work. Fortunately, through the keen interest which my pupil-friend Miss Vasumati C. Parekh, M.A., a member of the Society, took in this matter, Shri N. C. Parekh, her brother, offered a donation sufficient to cover the expenses of the publication of this work. The Society accepted with sincere gratitude the offer of Shri N. C. Parekh which in course of time will enable us to undertake the publication of other similar works.

II

Now, a few words about the Ms. The Ms. is in type-script and bears the title "Four Lectures on the Meaning of the *Mahābhārata*." This rather heavy-looking title has been abridged into the substantial title "*On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*." The Ms. bears all the signs of having been prepared with an eye to its eventual publication. In a great many places, sentences or paragraphs have been placed in rectangular brackets in pencil. It appears that this was done by the author for the purpose of the actual delivery of the lectures wherein the element of time is a vital factor. This bracketed material has been retained in the body of this book. Secondly, an alternative word or phrase is occasionally found written with a pencil in the margin along with an underscoring of the relevant word or words in the text. It is not possible—nor is it necessary—for us to speculate which word or phrase the author would have finally chosen. It is thought advisable to retain the text of the script as it stands, leaving such marginal alternatives alone. However, there is one exception: Dr. Sukthankar has re-written in pencil almost a whole para at the end of the third lecture. This pencil-script is incorporated in the body of the book. A facsimile of this page is re-produced as the frontispiece. An English rendering of the German quotation from OLDENBERG is given in an Appendix for the convenience of the general reader. In Index I Sanskrit quotations are printed in Devanāgarī for the benefit of those not quite conversant with the transliteration.

It is apparent from p. 34 that Dr. Sukthankar intended later on to add a summary of the story of the *Mahābhārata* in his own words. This, unfortunately, he could not do. This gap is marked by three asterisks in the text. However, a more valuable piece of information has been lost to us for good. As page 43 would show, Dr. Sukthankar left a blank space to be filled in afterwards, regarding the exact number of permutations of the sequence of short and long syllables which are possible in the *śloka* metre. How we wish he had been able to fill in this blank space!

There are naturally many quotations from the text of the *Mahābhārata*. Most of them are fully identified by Dr. Sukthankar himself. In a few cases, however, there is a bare mention of the Parvan in which the verses are to be found. All such references have been traced in the Critical Edition and full identification is given. This has led to some interesting revelations. Dr. Sukthankar apparently did not confine himself to the text of the Critical Edition even where it was available. For instance, the hemistich *Svadharmam pratipadyasva jahi śatrūn samāgatān* on p. 69 is not accepted in the constituted text of the Critical Edition; the foot-notes indicate that this line is found in passage 111* in the Āraṇyaka Parvan. The reference to 'Dharmavāṇijyaka' on p. 73 is also not traceable to the text of the Critical Edition. Sometimes Dr. Sukthankar has given readings which are not incorporated in the text of the Critical Edition, e.g. the reading *Evam uktvā Yaduśreṣṭhaś Cedirājasya tatkṣaṇāt* on p. 37 is recorded in the foot-notes in passage 401* line 8 in the Critical Edition. Similarly, *Sahāyārtham ca te vīrāḥ* on page 65 is recorded as a variant in the foot-notes. Strange, however, is the case of *Katham samabhavad bhedas teṣām akliṣṭakāriṇām* on p. 33. The Critical Edition reads *akliṣṭakarmaṇām* with a wavy line below. *Akliṣṭakāriṇām* is not reported at all in the Critical Edition! It is safe to surmise that Dr. Sukthankar used and relied upon the Vulgate for the purposes of these lectures. In fact, in a few places he identifies the quotation by prefixing the letter B (i.e. Bombay) before mentioning the Parvan. A scholar of Dr. Sukthankar's eminence who spent a life-time in practising the Analytical approach to the study of the *Mahābhārata* appears to end up with what is tantamount to its negation! However, the first lecture in the book will help us understand his attitude better.

It was only to be expected that with his characteristic love of precision and gracefulness of expression, Dr. Sukthankar would have scrutinized the script of his lectures thoroughly before it was sent to the press. However, that was not to be. Under the circumstances, we have only thankfully to accept the script as he has left it and make the best possible use of it.

The importance of these lectures can hardly be over-rated. They represent the final and mature views of a *Mahābhārata* scholar whose claims to speak on the problems of the Great Epic were, perhaps, better than those of any of his contemporaries.

I should like to thank Shri N. A. Gore, M.A., Dip. Lib., Librarian of the Society, for compiling the two Indexes.

G. C. JHALA
Hon. Secretary.

Town Hall, Bombay 1.
6th August 1957.

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LECTURE I

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA AND ITS CRITICS

Durvijñeyam ataḥ sarvair
Bhārataṁ tu surair api.
— Ānandatīrtha, Mbh. T. N. 2.149

" The Mahābhārata," wrote Hermann OLDENBERG, " began its existence as a simple epic narrative. It became, in course of centuries, the most monstrous chaos."

A forceful and imaginative writer, OLDENBERG has drawn for us a vivid pen-picture of this chaotic epic or epic chaos, as it appeared to him, which is worth quoting in extenso as a piece of fine rhetoric :

" Neben der Haupterzählung gab es dort wahre Urwälder kleinerer Erzählungen, dazu zahllose und endlose Belehrungen über Theologisches, Philosophisches, Naturwissenschaftliches, Recht, Politik, Lebensweisheit und Lebensklugheit. Ein Gedicht voll tiefsinnigen Träumens und Ahnens, zarter Poesie, schulmeisterlicher Plattheit — voll von funkeln-dem Farbenspiel, erdrückenden, sich zerdrückenden Massen von Bildern, vom Pfeilregen endloser Kämpfe, Gewimmel über Gewimmel todesverachtender Helden, übertugendlicher Mustermenschen, berückend schöner Frauen, Jähzorniger Asketen, abenteuerlicher Fabelwesen, toller Mirakel — von leerem Wortschwall und von weiten, freien Blicken in die Ordnungen des Weltlaufes."

This quizzical verdict of the great German Indologist — a veritable prodigy of industry and erudition — appears indeed to be justified. Our poem, though commonly called the Great Epic of India, does not fulfil very completely Matthew ARNOLD's postulate that "the subject of the epic poem must be some *one* great complex action." There are indeed noticeable, winding in and out of the capacious and multitudinous folds of this prodigious and remarkable tapestry, unmistakable traces of some great and complex action. But on account of the mass of legends and disquisitions in which the main theme lies embedded, it is difficult to make out even the main outlines of the story underlying the action. "Swollen by these inventions," as one sympathetic critic of the *Mahābhārata* touchingly protests, "the portentous volumes are enough to damp the spirit of the most ardent who, starting off gaily upon their journey, are soon faced by the deserts of Levitical doctrine and the morasses of primitive speculation, interesting only to the antiquarian." Owing to these digressions, which seem to have grown like a malignant parasite on the original heroic story and which do in a sense hamper the free movement of the great drama, the poem appears not only to lose in artistic value but to be even lacking in bare unity.

Even such an ardent and passionate admirer of the *Mahābhārata* as Romesh Chunder DUTT felt constrained to admit this defect in the poem, and bemoan most eloquently the loss of the original primitive epic. He has told us how he pictured to himself the lamentable process of this progressive deterioration. "The epic," he wrote (1898), "became so popular that it went on growing with the growth of centuries. Every generation of poets had something to add ; every distant nation in Northern India was anxious to interpolate some account of its deeds in the old record of the international war ; every preacher of a new creed desired to have in the old Epic some sanction for the new truths he inculcated. Passages from legal and moral codes were incorporated in the work which appealed to the nation much more effectively than dry codes ; and rules about the different castes and about the different stages of the human life were included for the same purpose. All the floating mass of tales, traditions, legends, and myths....found a shelter under the expanding wings of this wonderful Epic; and as Krishna worship became the prevailing religion of India after the decay of Buddhism, the old Epic caught the complexion of the times, and Krishna-cult is its dominating religious idea in its present shape. It is thus that the work went on growing for a thousand years after it was first compiled and put together in the form of an Epic; until the crystal rill of the Epic itself was all but lost in an unending morass of religious and didactic episodes, legends, tales and traditions."

He was however by no means utterly pessimistic. For he subsequently adds that "although the old Epic has thus been spoilt by unlimited expansion, yet nevertheless the leading incidents and characters of the real Epic are still discernible, uninjured by the mass of foreign substance in which they are embedded — even like those immortal marble figures which have been recovered from the ruins of an ancient world, and now beautify the museums of modern Europe."

In that last sentence we have the key-note of DUTT's ideology. DUTT, evidently fascinated by the artistic products of Classical Greece, with its well-modelled and astonishingly beautiful specimens of plastic art and the form-perfect creations of the epic Muse, was unconsciously applying Greek standards to an Indian composition — at best a hazardous procedure — not realizing the essential difference between the Indian and the Greek ideals. With the Greeks the dominant passion was the conscious quest of ideal beauty: with the Indians it has invariably been the quest of ideal life.

DUTT's violent distaste for the didactic and episodical portions of the poem, which he regarded as encumbrances, led him to condense our great epic. In the now famous and deservedly popular rendering of the *Mahābhārata* prepared by him in 1898, he has given a full and unabridged translation into English verse of the main and striking incidents of the epic, these pieces being linked together by short connecting notes, which together present the story to the modern reader "in a form and within limits which might be acceptable." In this way DUTT has tried apologetically to insinuate the fertilizing waters of the tempestuous torrent of our national epic poetry, by means of a neat little modern concrete canal, into the stream of world literature.

OLDENBERG had always contended that the "original" of the *Mahābhārata* was composed of short poetical pieces joined together by connecting links in prose. It is not unlikely that Romesh DUTT, starting with a similar idea, had imagined that in his English rendering of our poem he had arrived at the form of the epic as it was originally put together, some centuries before the Christian era, before it was "spoilt" by moralizing and sectarian Brahmin interpolators.

If Romesh DUTT, a thoroughbred "native" of India with just a thin veneer of Western culture, had after a life-long study of the epic failed to grasp the real significance of what he elsewhere describes as "the greatest work of imagination that Asia has produced" — he might even have said, with some justification, that the world has produced — there is nothing strange in the circumstance that most of the Western critics have likewise failed to do so. They have uniformly felt and exhibited a characteristic uneasiness—I may even say helplessness—when faced with the — to them, unnatural — phenomenon of an avowedly narrative poem in which the "moral", so to say, is nearly four times as long as the story itself. Their researches have, consequently, revolved almost invariably round the idea of finding criteria for distinguishing between the "early" and the "late" portions of the epic, between the original and the interpolation, criteria for cutting away what they naturally regard as the asphyxiating parasite and exposing the old primitive saga in its pristine purity and glory.

This definitive direction seems to have been given to Western studies in connection with the *Mahābhārata* almost from the beginning. Franz BOPP, the Father of Indo-germanic Philology, (who was also the first in modern times to edit from manuscripts selected episodes from the *Mahābhārata* and make them available in a printed form,) had expressed his opinion as early as 1829 — now more than a century ago —

that all parts of the epic were not of the same age, — which is in a way no doubt quite true.

BOPP was closely followed by that encyclopaedic writer Christian LASSEN, who was the first European scholar to submit the *Mahābhārata* to a complete analysis and with whom the modern critical study of the epic may be said to have begun. As a result of his erudite researches, this versatile scholar, endorsing the conclusions of BOPP, expressed his conviction that in the *Mahābhārata* we have pieces belonging to very different periods and of very different colour and content. He tried therefore to separate the various strata and to date them — a very hazardous venture at any time. His conclusions may be subbarized thus. The recitation of the *Mahābhārata* at the sacrifice of Śaunaka must be understood to be the second recension of the poem. This recension is the one referred to in the Gṛhya Sūtra of Āśvalāyana (3.4.4), whom LASSEN places — quite hypothetically of course — about 350 B.C. Now as this Āśvalāyana was the direct disciple of Śaunaka (identified by LASSEN without any further proof with the Kulapati Śaunaka of the epic story), the *second* recension of the *Mahābhārata* must have been made about 460 or 400 B.C. Since that time, LASSEN held, the only additions made to the poem were of a "Krishnite" character. Eliminating these, we may accept the work on the whole as a monument of pre-Buddhist India. To us these stratificatory adventures and chronological speculations of LASSEN appear crude and puerile in the extreme; they were taken very seriously by his contemporaries, and regarded as a stupendous advance in their knowledge of the Great Epic of India. Owing to his very perfunctory study of this prodigious poem, the learned author of the *Indische Alterthumskunde* had failed to realize that eliminating the "Krishnite" elements from our *Mahābhārata* was a not less serious operation than removing all the vital elements from the body of a living organism; and that consequently the residue would no more represent the "original" heroic poem than a mangled cadavre, lacking the vital elements, would represent the organism in its origin or infancy.

Another notable attempt at reconstructing the original epic was made between 1883 and 1894 by the Scandinavian scholar Sören SÖRENSEN, to whom we also owe the excellent *Index to the Names in the Mahābhārata* (London 1904-1925), a solid contribution to *Mahābhārata* studies, indispensable to every serious student of the Great Epic. His attempts at reconstruction of the epic kernel have unfortunately not proved equally valuable. He starts with the very innocuous assumption that in its oldest form the *Mahābhārata* must have been a saga. That being granted, the unity of the main story shows that it was the creation of a single mind: which is also a very reasonable assumption. In the original poem, therefore, SÖRENSEN argues, there could be no contradiction, repetition or digression — anything, in fact, which would mar its unity and homogeneity. These were some of the leading ideas underlying his reconstruction of the Ur-Mahābhārata. Rejecting accordingly from the Vulgate text everything that appeared to him like an episode or a didactic digression, he obtained at first an edition of some 27,000 stanzas. But even this extract, he thought, included materials belonging to different epochs. He therefore proceeded to deduct from this trituration immense blocks of the text which appeared to him to betray their character as interpolations by the fact that they contained a mention of persons or things of a modern date. This second attenuation rendered the epic to a concentrated essence of some seven or eight thousand stanzas, which seems to have satisfied the soul of SÖRENSEN. Is there not somewhere a mention of 8800 ślokas of an enigmatic character, which Vyāsa knew and Śuka knew and which Saṁjaya may or may not have known? The number of stanzas in SÖRENSEN's "Ur-text" is strangely close to the so-called "kūṭaślokas" mentioned in an oft-cited stanza which is a patent interpolation found in some very late Devanāgarī manuscripts and which has consequently been rejected in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*. Was SÖRENSEN perhaps unconsciously influenced in his computations by this fictitious figure? It is difficult to say. In any case, Auguste BARTH, a keen student of Indian religious literature and withal an impartial and outspoken critic, after careful consideration of the arguments advanced by SÖRENSEN in support of his thesis, was constrained to pass on it a verdict which may be regarded as final : " le méthode de l'auteur, malgré toutes le précautions possible, est arbitraire et ...... le problème tel qu'il le pose, est en réalité insoluble." Yes, it may safely be added to the list of insoluble problems.

SÖRENSEN'S attempt at establishing the UR-TEXT of the *Mahābhārata* stands by itself, and the experiment was, as far as I know, never repeated. Instead, European scholars contented themselves with theorizing about the nature and the character of the " nucleus " and perfecting their criteria for distinguishing between the " old " and the " new," the original and the spurious in the epic text. Special attention, wrote (1896) the Vedic scholar LUDWIG, must be given to the way in which the various episodes have been joined together, whether they have been welded into a harmonious whole or whether they have been pieced together clumsily. The critic must be on the look-out for " misconceived links," " striking laboriousness," " absolute superfluity," " repetion of the theme," " unnatural and farfetched motivation," " incongruity between the explanation and the matter to be explained," and so on and so forth. These are all sure indications of unoriginality and interpolation. The critic must further study closely the metre, language and style. A sudden change in any of these is thoroughly suspicious and calls for special inquiry. As a result of such a thorough-going examination, we may hope to distinguish confidently the different strata and analyse the poem correctly into its components. Notwithstanding the high-sounding phrases in which it is couched, it is easy to see that even this critique cannot give absolutely certain and dependable results, it being merely the exploitation of individual opinion, which selects what pleases it and rejects, on insufficient evidence, what is incompatible with a preconceived subjective scheme.

This atomistic method reaches its culmination in the researches of the great American Indologist E. Washburn HOPKINS, who had specialized in the *Mahābhārata* and who, as a result of an intensive study of the epic extending over many years, made the interesting discovery that there was no text there at all. He could see only a nebulous mass of incongruities, absurdities, contradictions, anachronisms, accretions and interpolations! "In what shape," asks HOPKINS, "has epic poetry (in India) come down to us?" And his own answer is: "*A text that is no text* (italics mine), enlarged and altered in every recension, chapter after chapter recognized even by native commentaries as prakṣipta, in a land without historical sense or care for the preservation of popular monuments, where no check was put on any reciter or copyist who might add what beauties or polish what parts he would, where it was a merit to add a glory to the pet god, where every popular poem was handled freely and is so to this day."

Seeing that despite his categorical denial of the existence of a text, he has on his hands a corpus of some 200,000 verses, which is about eight times the size of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together and which the Indian people have persisted during the last two thousand years in calling their national epic, HOPKINS moots the question when this curious text — which is no text — could have been composed. To this question he could give only a cryptic answer, reminding us of the wise pronouncements of the Delphic oracle. The time of the present *Mahābhārata*, writes HOPKINS, was one "when the sixty-four kalāṣ were known, when continuous iambic pādas were written, when the latest systems of philosophy were recognized, when the trimūrti was acknowledged, when there were one hundred and one Yajur Veda schools, when the sun was called Mihira, when Greek words had become familiar, and the Greeks were known as wise men, when the eighteen islands and eighteen Purāṇas were known, when was known the whole literature down to grammars, commentaries, Dharmaçāstras, granthas, pustakas, *witten* Vedas, and complete MSS. of the Mahābhārata including the Harivaṅça."

This rigmarole is just his special way of proving the lack of unity in the epic and its late date. The learned labours of HOPKINS ultimately crystallized in the preparation of a complicated table of approximate dates of the work in its different stages, which he probably regarded as his greatest contribution to the study of the epic and the final solution of the Mahābhārata Problem. Here is the scheme of dates rigged up by HOPKINS :

400 B.C. : Bhārata (Kuru) lays, perhaps combined into one, but with no evidence of an epic.

400 to 200 B.C. : A Mahābhārata tale with Pāṇḍu heroes, lays and legends combined by the Puranic diaskeuasts ; Kṛṣṇa as a demigod ; no evidence of didactic form or of Kṛṣṇa's divine supremacy.

200 B.C. to 200 A.D. : Remaking of the epic with Kṛṣṇa as all-god, intrusion of masses of didactic matter, addition of Puranic material old and new ; multiplication of exploits.

200 to 400 A.D. : The last books added with the introduction to the first book, the swollen Anuśāsana separated from Śānti and recognized as a separate book ; and finally,

400 A.D. + : Occasional amplifications.

Without wishing to detract from the merits of the work done by HOPKINS in other fields, which may have its own value, I will say candidly that for all intents and purposes this pretentious table is as good as useless, — as it was indeed bound to be. "All dates," says WHITNEY, "given in Indian literary history are pins set up to be bowled down again." This was never more true than in the case of the dates given by HOPKINS, which are in fact, one and all, quite hypothetical and perfectly arbitrary. Indeed there is not one figure or one statement in the above table which can be verified or which can lay claims to objective validity.

Let me state here more fully, for the sake of clarity, the view-point of the modern analytical criticism of the *Mahābhārata*. Modern criticism begins with the assumption that the epic is definitely not the work of any one poet, like most works of antiquity. No one can write unaided a poem of 100,000 stanzas. We cannot possibly conceive any *one* man being equal to the task attributed to the supposed author of the epic, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa. The poem is, therefore, unquestionably a compilation, embodying the work of many writers of varying abilities — some of them even real poets — who have added to the original corpus from time to time as it pleased them. The result is naturally a confused assemblage of heterogenous matter originating from different hands and belonging to different strata. A careful analysis of the poem from this view-point reveals the fact that in its present form at least, the work has a radical defect in so far as it consists fundamentally of two mutually incompatible elements, namely, a certain "epic nucleus" and an extensive and undigested mass of didactic-episodical matter, elements which are but loosely hinged together and which form moreover an unbalanced combination. The first element, the epic nucleus, is naturally the older component and is presumably based on an historical reality, which is preserved in a highly distorted and tendentious form but which retains nevertheless certain genuine archaic features in fossilized condition such as polyandry and levirate, which latter are of immense interest and importance for the study of Indian ethnology and prehistoric antiquity. The nucleus mentioned above was now unfortunately used — or rather misused — by wily priests, tedious moralists and dogmatizing lawyers as a convenient peg on which to hang their didactic discourses and sacerdotal legends, which have naturally no organic connection with the epic nucleus. This nucleus of the epic, a Kṣatriya tale of love and war, does possess a sort of unity, which is lacking entirely in the other element, the priestly episodes and the moralizing discourses, which latter by themselves, loosened from their moorings, would neatly and automatically fall apart. The epic story is in part at least a fairly well-constructed narrative, worthy of our attention, and produces the impression of having been yet more virile — a real "human document" — before it was distorted in the process of assimilation with the moralistic pabulum and legal claptrap of a grasping and degenerate priesthood. The *Mahābhārata* is in short a veritable chaos, containing some good and much useless matter. It is a great pity that a fine heroic poem, which may even be found to contain precious germs of ancient Indian history, should have been thus ruined by its careless custodians. But it is not quite beyond redemption. A skilful surgical operation — technically called " Higher Criticism "— could still disentangle the submerged " epic core " from the adventitious matter — known to textual critics as "Interpolation"— in which it lies embedded. The Mahābhārata Problem thus reduces itself to the discovery of criteria which will enable us to analyse the poem and to dissect out the " epic nucleus " from the spurious additions with which it is deeply incrusted. This is the " Analytical Theory " of the origin and the character of the *Mahābhārata*, which was espoused by the majority of the Western critics of the Great Epic of India, chief among them being LASSEN, WEBBER, LUDWIG, SÖRENSEN, HOPKINS and WINTERNITZ.

This theory is obviously the outcome of superficial study. The epic at first sight does produce upon a casual observer the impression of being a bizarre and meaningless accumulation of heterogeneous elements. This first impression, however,—as has been pointed out by HELD — soon makes room for a second, that of astonishment, as one realizes that this massive monument of Indian antiquity may undoubtedly lay claim to being more or less flawless from the constructional view-point and withal perfectly balanced. This fact appears to have been clearly realized also by LUDWIG, himself an ardent advocate of the atomistic theory, who was honest enough to admit the organic unity of this stupendous poem. Notwithstanding his preconceptions, which led him to support the analytic theory, he confessed openly his inability to explain how, in spite of the extreme complicacies of mechanism, it operated in a manner so precise that no crass contradictions were discernible in this prodigious work, there being at most only vague traces here and there of what might be regarded as such.

But that is not the end of the story. There is another little odd twist in the poem, we are told : a subtle sort of topsyturvydom underlying the story and vitiating it from beginning to end. The poem has obviously a didactic purpose. It sets out clearly to inculcate a moral. Its method is to contrast the life and fate of the righteous Pāṇḍavas and the urighteous Kauravas, and to induce people to lead a good and virtuous life by demonstrating that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, truth and virtue do triumph in the end (*yato dharmas tato jayaḥ*). This is undoubtedly a very laudable objective. And yet even this simple and clear aim is scarcely achieved by the poem. The characters do not consistently act the parts which they are advertised to do. The "heroes" of the poem are indeed constantly talking about Dharma, but their actions belie their hollow professions and do not conform even to the most elementary standards of common morality. They are not real heroes, with pure white shining souls. They give one the impression rather of being "villains," who have been liberally whitewashed by interested poets.

Observe how these "righteous" Pāṇḍavas, the supposed souls of Dharma, are able to win the war only by Adharma, by a series of frauds or at least by some very shabby and unchivalrous acts, which no right-thinking person would hesitate to condemn. For instance, our "hero" Yudhiṣṭhira, the so-called Dharmarāja, when prompted by his less scrupulous advisers, yields, in spite of his much advertised righteousness, to the temptation of telling, at a very critical stage of the battle, a barefaced lie, knowing full well that his mendacious statement would be believed by his opponent and would inevitably bring about the untimely death of his own revered preceptor, to whom he pretends to be deeply attached and who — according to theory — has indisputable claims on his unswerving homage and allegiance.

Take another instance. The blustering and boastful Bhīma deals Duryodhana, while engaged in a mortal combat with him, an admittedly foul blow, breaking his thighs and incapacitating him, quite against the rules of the game, which his chivalrous opponent rigidly observes. This is a very cowardly and barbarous act, which reflects no credit on our hero or his advisers, but on the contrary shows them up in their true colours, condemning them in our eyes as treacherous hooligans.

And, finally, even the noble and god-like Arjuna, the special friend and protégé of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is far from being an example of the "verray parfit gentle Knight." He is guilty of killing in cold blood the venerable Bhīṣma, the grandsire of the Kurus, shooting at him while hiding behind another effeminate warrior with whom the old knight could not fight, and thus screening himself, like a coward, from retaliation by his stalwart opponent. Again while fighting with the truly noble Karṇa in a single combat, Arjuna shoots and kills his honourable rival when the latter is at a disadvantage and is humbly pleading for time. Vain is the plea of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that Karṇa, having behaved meanly before, had forfeited the right of equitable treatment and could not now appeal for justice or mercy. Two wrongs do not make a right. Can we regard these Pāṇḍava brothers as models of heroism, chivalry, nobility or righteousness ?

The Kauravas on the other hand unquestionably behave more honourably and on the whole more magnanimously. They never stoop to employ such base and ignominious tricks on the battlefield against their enemies. They are manly, courageous, chivalrous and noble. These great scions of an old aristocratic family could play more worthily the distinguished rôle of the heroes of the Indian epopee than the treacherous and sanctimonious Pāṇḍavas, who show themselves to have been in reality ignoble parvenus and usurpers, glorified by a later generation. The poem itself naïvely records that at the moment of Duryodhana's death, though the ungenerous and brutal Bhīma was mean enough to kick and trample on the annointed head of the fallen monarch, the gods themselves showered flowers on the defeated hero. And this Duryodhana is now the villain of the piece ! It is unnecessary to multiply examples.

Here is a paradox. The book gives itself out as a dharmagrantha. With uplifted arms, we are told, Vyāsa proclaims that Dharma is supreme in this world. But that is a high ideal which even his characters — his own creations — do not fulfil !

The above are just a few examples of an inherent contradiction subsisting between the story and the "moral" sought to be inculcated in the epic in its present form. The poem does contain explanations condoning the "Sins" of the Pāṇḍavas. But that is special pleading, sheer casuistry, which fails to carry conviction to any but the most simple-minded of the readers.

The talented discoverer of this set of facts was Adolf HOLTZMANN. It was to explain this element of contradiction in the story that he thought out his ingenious theory, which HOPKINS later styled the " Inversion Theory " and which found many adherents. This criticism, which bases itself on the supposed want of unity in the characters, is an effort to prove not merely a change but a complete *inversion* (in our present story) of the original theme, which explains its name " Inversion Theory." " Starting with the two-old nature of Krishna-Vishnu as man and god," as HOPKINS says in describing the theory, " and with the glossed-over sins of the Pandus, the critic argues that the first poem was written for the glory of the Kurus, and subsequently tampered with to magnify the Pandus ; and that in this latter from we have our present Epic, dating from before the fourth century B.C." The first poem would thus be completely changed, or, as one writer has expressed it " set upon its head."

The indefatigable author of this theory, who had taken immense pains to study the epic from various angles in search of arguments to support and fortify his pet thesis, ultimately arrived at the following recondite reconstruction of the epic, as summarized by HELD : " Right back in the most ancient times there was a guild of court-singers who extolled in their professional poetry the mighty deeds of their monarchs. Then came a talented poet who made of the original epic, composed in honour of the renowned race of the Kauravas, a poem in praise of a great Buddhist ruler, perhaps Aśoka. But now the new teaching, coming into conflict with the growing pretensions of the Brahmins, begins to decline, and the priests convert the now popular poem to their own use, but reverse the original purpose of the work as a whole. Now it is no longer the Kauravas who are lauded but their very adverseries, the Pāṇḍavas, to whom a decided predilection for the Brahmanical doctrine is ascribed. The epic is subjected to further revision. Buddhism is eliminated altogether, both Vishnu and Krishna are thrust into the foreground, the Epic is assimilated to the ancient and sacred chronicles of the Purāṇas and portions of a didactic character are interpolated. And in this revised and irrecognisably altered recension the Epic was non-existent until the twelfth century A.D."

These wild aberrations of HOLTZMANN, which hardly deserve the name of a theory that is commonly applied to it, have now little more than an antiquarian interest. They are, as was pointed out by BARTH, not only at variance with the probable course of the religious and literary history of India, but they also stand in crass contradiction with positive and dated facts. The latter relation was brought out especially by the quite independent investigations of BÜHLER regarding the *Mahābhārata*, which were more of a factitive character and which clearly showed that there were no indications of any important additions having been made to the epic after the eleventh century. Furthermore, as BÜHLER showed, already in the eighth century the poem must have had a form not very different from the one in which we now possess it, namely, as a Dharmaśāstra or a Smṛti work, that is, a book of sacred lore. The epigraphic evidence, moreover, clearly proved that the epic was known as early as the fifth century A.D. as a work consisting of 100,000 stanzas and composed by the great Ṛṣi Vyāsa. From this clear and unequivocal evidence, BÜHLER drew the important conclusion that the work must unquestionably have been extant in practically the same shape as at present, several centuries prior to 400 A.D. This momentous finding of BÜHLER demolished completely the rickety chronological framework of HOLTZMANN'S fantastic reconstruction and made it clear that the historical background of the thesis was, fundamentally, as unsound as it was absurd.

HOLTZMANN'S theory found, however, a doughty champion in the Viennese Professor Leopold von SCHROEDER, who by pruning away the more patent absurdities set it once more on its legs, and even popularized it through the persuasive quality of his felicitous style and suave mannerism. SCHROEDER'S exposition of the original theory appealed to those scholars who were impressed by HOLTZMANN'S novel demonstration of an unsuspected element of contradiction in the very plot of the epic, but who were not prepared to give their assent to all the fatuous eccentricities of the author of the original theory. In the new theory Aśoka was banished, and the conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism was discreetly thrust in the background. The inversion theme, which was the pivot of the whole theory, was naturally retained and strengthened.

Remodelled by the genial SCHROEDER, the Inversion Theory took the following shape, as described by HOPKINS. "The original poet .... lived at a time when Brahmā was the highest god (700 to 500 or 400 B.C.) ; and this singer was a child of the Kuru-land. He heard reports of the celebrated Kuru race that once reigned in his land, but had been destroyed by the dishonourable fighting of a strange race of invaders. This tragical overthrow he depicted in such a way as to make his native heroes models of knightly virtue, while he painted the victors (Pāndus, Panchālas, Matsyas), with Krishna, hero of the Yādavas, at their head, as ignoble and shamefully victorious. This is the old Bhārata song mentioned in Āçvalāyana. After a time Krishna became a god, and his priests, supported by the Pāndus, sought to make Krishna (Vishnu) worthy to be set against Buddha. Their exertions were successful. Vishnu in the fourth century became the great god, and his grateful priests rewarded their helpers, the Pāndus, by taking the Bhārata poem in hand and making a complete change in the story, so as to relieve them of the reproaches of the old poet. Finally they worked it into such shape that it praised the Pāndus and blamed their opponents. About this time they inserted all the episodes that glorify Vishnu as the highest god. The Pāndus then pretended that they had originally belonged to the Kuru stock, and the cousinship portrayed in the poem was invented ; whereas they were really an alien, probably a southern race."

This ill-conceived theory, though advocated by LASSEN, WINTERNITZ and J. J. MEYER, has been discountenanced, for different reasons, by even BARTH, Sylvain LÉVI PISCHEL, JACOBI, OLDENBERG, and HOPKINS. It has thus been condemned by scholars justly eminent in criticism of the epic and in

Sanskrit scholarship. The only reason that has been adduced in support of it, as has already been indicated, is the alleged justification of the hateful rôle said to have been played by the Pāṇḍavas in the old form of the epic and the reproaches heaped upon the Kauravas, the royal heroes of the old poem. The protagonists of this theory want us, in other words, to believe that the Pāṇḍavas and their partisans, the priests of Viṣṇu, took a poem that was written to defame the Pāṇḍavas and Viṣṇu, and written over again so as to represent them as perfect.

In canvassing our support to the inversion theme, HOLTZMANN, like a dextrous juggler, manipulating his material in an adroit manner, manages to show us all the time only one side of the shield, never letting us see the other side at all. It is indeed true that the Pāṇḍavas make themselves guilty of some slight breaches of pugilistic conventions in the course of the long drawn out and bitter war of annihilation fought out on the plains of Kurukṣetra. Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and Duryodhana were all killed in the war by subterfuges or tricks which violate the strict code of chivalrous and knightly combats. But the Kauravas are just as unscrupulous, if not indeed more so; only they are discreet and diplomatic in the extreme. Their "sins," as HOPKINS has pointed out, smack of cultivated wickedness. They secretly try to burn their enemies alive. They seek to waylay and kill the ambassador of the Pāṇḍavas. They form a conspiracy and send out ten men under oath (Saṁśaptakas) to attack Arjuna. They slay Arjuna's son first in order to weaken Arjuna's heart. Are these dark deeds worthy of models of royal and knightly honour? The truth is that the Kauravas are crafty and designing; they are shrewd enough not to break the smaller laws of propriety. They plot in secret, hiding their deceitfulness under an ostentatious cloak of justice and benevolence. They sin at heart, and present to the world a smiling and virtuous face. The Pāṇḍavas are on the other hand represented throughout as being truly ingenuous and guileless. They do "sin": they are human for that. But their "sins" are palpably overt and markedly evident. The Kauravas are sanctimonious hypocrites; the wrath and animosity of the grossly outraged Pāṇḍavas stare us in the face.

The contrast is well marked and clearly intended. "The sociological data of the epic period," says HOPKINS in commenting on this aspect of the argument, "show that society had advanced from a period when rude manners were justifiable and tricks were considered worthy of a warrior to one when a finer morality had begun to temper the crude royal and military spirit. This is sufficient explanation of that historical anomaly found in the Great Epic, the endeavour on the part of the priestly redactors to palliate and excuse the sins of their heroes." An earlier age, according to HOPKINS, allowed what a later condemned. He, therefore, concludes that two types of civilization are embalmed in the poem. "Those same priests who framed the fighting code," remarks HOPKINS in another place, "and endeavoured to implant in the brutal warrior kings a moral, not to say a chivalrous sentiment, might have been swayed by two opposing desires in handing down their own national epic. They accordingly appear to have retained all the old excesses and barbarities, and expended their ingenuity in exonerating their royal patrons, the Pāṇḍavas, by casuistical excuses and facile constructions.

HELD has rightly rejected this specious explanation of HOPKINS, pointing out that there is no reason to picture to ourselves those more primitive cultures as a barbarian state of society in which "brutal warrior kings" were rampant. There is as a matter of fact no question here at all of the embalming of different types of civilization, as imagined by HOPKINS. It is very evident that most of the critical situations of this epic drama are the result of free invention by the poets inspired by a definite purpose that has remained hidden from HOPKINS and other critics of his school of thought. HOPKINS was justified in suspecting that the solution of the Mahābhārata Problem offered by HOLTZMANN and SCHROEDER was unsound, if not absolutely perverse; but the reasons he adduced for the rejection of the Inversion Theory are themselves not cogent.

In laying undue emphasis on the different periods of civilization, HOPKINS has entirely missed the point of the narrative. The contrast depicted in the poem, as any person gifted with common sense can see, is not the fortuitous outcome of the fusion of different epochs of civilization, but is clearly intended by the author or authors of the poem to portray different aspects of the human personality, to visualize the different types of the subtle psyche of man. The characterization of the Kauravas especially is obviously designed to clarify by vivid projection the acute contrast between the "Inner Man" and the "Outer Man." And these two old neighbours are not creatures peculiar to any definite epoch or any particular country. They are international characters. Nay, they are universal. They have lived side by side at all times and in all climes. They are as active and potent today as they were in the time of the *Mahābhārata* and even before that, in prehistoric times. How the didactic interludes of the poem are woven into the fabric of the tale and what their *raison d'être* is will be explained in the sequel. But it would not be inappropriate to point out even at this stage — though I am anticipating somewhat — that the main interest of the epic is held and centred precisely on the subtle interplay of personality, on the disparity and conflict between the "Inner Man" and the "Outer Man", in other words, on happenings hidden from the outside world in the very soul of man. And it is just this factor which gives this immortal book a lasting value and interest in the eyes of every thoughtful inquirer into the mysteries of life, placing it on a level with the greatest works of fiction and drama of all times.

The atomistic methods of the advanced critics of the *Mahābhārata* having proved barren of any useful or intelligent result, some attempt was made to understand the poem as a whole. The most notable of these legitimate endeavours was that of Joseph DAHLMANN, and as such it deserves special recognition. A certain underlying unity of aim and plan in this gigantic work was postulated and dogmatically emphasized by this great Jesuit scholar, who of all the foreign critics of the *Mahābhārata* may be said to approach nearest to any real understanding of the Great Epic of India. He propounded a view of the origin and character of the *Mahābhārata* which HOPKINS dubbed as the "Synthetic Theory." This theory categorically repudiates as utterly fantastic the modern notion that the Great Epic is but a haphazard compilation of disjointed and incoherent units. It insists on the other hand — as the name of the theory already suggests — that the *Mahābhārata* is primarily a synthesis, a synthesis of all the various aspects of Law, in the widest sense of the term, covered by the Indian conception of Dharma, cast by a master intellect into the alluring shape of a story, of an epic. In other words, the *Mahābhārata* is an epic and a law-book (Rechtsbuch) *in one*. There is thus no question whatsoever of an " epic core " that had become gradually incrusted with didactic accretions, an idea which is nothing more than a phantasy, just an obsession of the modern critic. The poem is, as Indian tradition has always implied, a conscious product of literary art (kāvya) of the highest order, with a pronounced unity of conception, aim, and treatment. It is not in any sense the work of generations of poets, but the work of a single " diaskeuast ", who has welded various existing elements into a single organic whole and produced an epic that more or less satisfied the requirements of a definite structural unity.

It was extremely daring on the part of the author of this theory to formulate and openly advocate a radical view-point like this in conscious and determined opposition to the prevailing theories regarding the character and origin of the Great Epic of India. He was challenging the almost unanimous verdict of self-styled authorities on the subject of the *Mahābhārata*. Undismayed by the barrage of hostile and even mocking criticism which greeted his first work on the subject, *Das Mahābhārata als Epos und Rechtsbuch* (1895), he continued his labours, defending his favourite thesis again, with great eloquence and enthusiasm, in a second volume, *Genesis des Mahābhārata* (1899), which met with no better reception at the hands of his intolerant and opinionated colleagues, who would not be convinced.

In these earnest and thought-provoking books, DAHLMANN has shown, on the basis of well selected and convincing examples, that the relation between the narrative and the didactic matter in our epic was definitely not of a casual character, but was intentional and purposive, concluding therefrom that it was impossible to separate the two elements without destroy-

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ing or mutilating the poem; just as one cannot separate the textile fabric of a tapestry from the picture it depicts without defacing and injuring the tapestry. And this demonstration is the most valuable part of the work of DAHLMANN. The didactic matter of the epic, DAHLMANN insisted, was a necessary — nay, an essential — element of the poem, of which the fable itself was in fact largely invented just for the purpose of illustrating certain well defined maxims of law, certain legal, moral and ethical principles underlying the fabric of Indian Society. Thus, for example, there is, according to DAHLMANN, in the crucial instance no historical basis for the polyandric marriage of Draupadī with the Pāṇḍava brothers, which is to be understood only symbolically. The Pāṇḍavas themselves symbolize the undivided or joint family; and Draupadī, their common wife in the story, stands for the ideal embodiment and representation of the unconditional unity of the family. A tribal confederacy may perhaps have formed the historical basis of the unity of the Pāṇḍavas. Draupadī would then symbolize the corporate unity and undivided authority of the confederacy.

According to DAHLMANN, the origin of the epos as a didactic work was founded in the basic character of rhapsody, which was the natural guardian and herald of the sacred lore. The rhapsody, then, as the vehicle (Trägerin) of sacred lore, became naturally the creator of poesy and of a manual of popular instruction (Lehrbuch) at the same time.

We may summarize as follows the main conclusions of DAHLMANN with regard to the questions in which we are at present particularly interested:

(1) The epic is a well defined unity.

(2) All the different parts of the poem are joined together with some distinct and definite purpose, and answering admirably that purpose.

(3) The unity of plan and aim was conceived in the mind of one single individual, who carried out the work in terms of this preconceived unity.

(4) Therefore successive expansion, and one or more recasts of the poem are out of the question.

(5) The date of the poem as composed or compiled by the diaskeuast is certainly *not* later than the fifth century B.C.

With DAHLMANN the pendulum had clearly swung to the other extreme. We owe very impartial and searching criticisms of DAHLMANN'S views to JACOBI and BARTH, who have exposed certain weaknesses of the theory. Both JACOBI and BARTH admit the unity of aim and plan in the work, though both justly demur to the contention of DAHLMANN that the argument of the epic was invented merely for the purpose of illustrating maxims of law ; nor were they of course inclined to accept the date proposed for the composition of the poem by the author of the Synthetic Theory.

We must also admit now that DAHLMANN'S views regarding the unity and homogeneity of the text of the epic were much exaggerated. It can now be demonstrated, with mathematical precision, that the text of the *Mahābhārata* used by DAHLMANN — the Bombay or Calcutta edition of the Vulgate — is much inflated with late accretions and most certainly does not, as a whole, go back to the fifth century B.C. It may even contain some furtive additions which had been made as late as 1000 A.D. or even later. The critical edition of the *Mahābhārata,* which is being published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, shows that large blocks of the text of the Vulgate must on incontrovertible evidence be excised as comparatively late interpolations. The Brahmā-Gaṇeśa complex and the Kaṇika Nīti in the Ādi and the hymns to Durgā in the Virāṭa and the Bhīṣma parvans occur to our mind readily as examples of such casual interpolations. But the Southern Recension offers us illustrations of regular long poems being bodily incorporated in the epic, like the detailed description of the avatāras of Viṣṇu put in the mouth of Bhīṣma in the Sabhā, and the full enunciation of the Vaiṣṇavadharma in the Āśvamedhikaparvan, two passages comprising together about 2500 stanzas. When we know that these additions have been made in comparatively recent times, even so late as the period to which our written tradition reaches back, can we legitimately assume that our text was free from such intrusions during that prolonged period in the history of our text which extends beyond the periphery of our manuscript tradition ? In any case it is very evident that the text known to and used by DAHLMANN could not possibly go back in its entirety to the fifth century B.C. That is all very true. Nevertheless it is well to bear in mind that however much the textual critic might peel off from the external trappings of the Great Epic, its Gestalt remains absolutely unaltered.

DAHLMANN was profoundly impressed by the fact that the *Mahābhārata* was recognized throughout Indian antiquity, above all things, as a dharma-saṁhitā, as a smṛti. Witness the fact that the supposed hero of the epic, at least in its present form, is called Dharmarāja. He is the son of Dharma, in other words, Dharma incarnate (ātmā vai putranāmāsi). The Bhārata War was a dharma-yuddha. The field of battle itself was said to be a dharma-kṣetra (dharma-kṣetre Kurukṣetre). Victory, it is emphasized over and over again, is on the side of Dharma (yato dharmas tato jayaḥ). Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa incarnates himself as Śrī Kṛṣṇa merely to restore the fallen Dharma : dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya saṁbhavāmi yuge yuge. To DAHLMANN therefore the *Mahābhārata* appeared above all as a treatise on jurisprudence (dharmaśāstra). And he naturally concluded that it was composed with the avowed and exclusive object of expounding all the different aspects of Hindu Law, in the widest sense of the term not omitting even its historical and archaic features and oddities.

But that is hardly plausible since such an explanation of the work obviously contradicts its character as a traditional book belonging to the people. The work was evidently meant to be a tome of genuine popular interest, one that should be read, studied and meditated on by all classes of the Indian people, not only by the learned Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, but also by Vaiśyas and Śūdras,— the fifth Veda (Pañcamo vedaḥ), the new Veda of all people, irrespective of caste and creed. Now the man in the street, even in India, is definitely not interested in the intricacies of law, less still in the history and formulation of archaic and obsolete customs, as DAHLMANN was compelled to premise in view of the crucial example — as troublesome as ineradicable — of the polyandrous marriage of the princess of Pāñcāla. In a popular book, therefore,— as our epic claims to be — and has indeed proved to be — all those prolix argumentations on every conceivable topic could only be irrelevant, if we are to regard them merely as an ethnological retrospect or an historical commentary. *A priori* therefore we cannot accept DAHLMANN'S view as a sufficient explanation of the whole ideology of the *Mahābhārata*. There must be something more in the character of the *Mahābhārata* than a mere synthesis of all known aspects of law, even in its widest connotation of the Indian conception of Dharma.

It will be noticed that DAHLMANN had no explanation to offer of the paradox of Kṛṣṇa. Strangely enough — or perhaps quite characteristically — DAHLMANN entirely overlooked Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa who looms so large in the world of the epic poets as to overshadow the entire poem, who is to be found in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end of the entire epopee. With his eyes fixed on the dichotomy of Dharma and Adharma. the Jesuit Father missed completely the elusive Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the most characteristic creation of Indian genius, who was above Dharma and Adharma, beyond Good and Evil.

But we cannot afford to ignore Śrī Kṛṣṇa if we would understand aright the meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. DAHLMANN succeeded in understanding only Yudhiṣṭhira, the Dharmarāja. But Yudhiṣṭhira is, metaphorically speaking, merely the big tree of Dharma (dharmamayo mahādrumaḥ), the straight upright trunk with its expanse of foliage and branches, fruits and flowers, the thing one sees growing out of the soil on the surface of the earth. The root of this tree is elsewhere :

mūlam Kṛṣṇo Brahma ca brāhmaṇāś ca/ 1. 1. 66.

The root, hidden deep in the soil, is Kṛṣṇa and the inscrutable Brahma and the knowers of Brahma.

Well might OLDENBERG ask : "Wer ist Kṛṣṇa ?" Who is Kṛṣṇa, indeed ? That paradox of paradoxes ! A philosopher on the battlefield ! An ally who gives away his powerful army to swell the ranks of his opponents ; and himself, though the omnipotent lord of all weapons, takes a vow, before the commencement of the war, not to hold a weapon in his hands ! A god who avows impartiality towards all living beings, and yet like a wily and unscrupulous politician secretly plots for the victory of the Pāṇḍavas and the annihilation of the Kauravas ! Standing on the field of battle, this self-styled Avatāra preaches the lower morality and the Mere Man (Arjuna) the higher! A grotesque character who claims to be the highest god and behaves uncommonly like a "tricky mortal"!

This bizarre figure can certainly not belong to the original heroic poem, which must have been a straightforward work free from all contradictions of this kind. European savants are agreed that he must needs be an innovation, introduced secondarily into the original "epic nucleus." How could European savants, lacking as they do in their intellectual make-up the milleniums old back-ground of Indian culture, ever hope to penetrate this inscrutable mask of the Unknowable pulling faces at them, befooling them and enjoying their antics? However we shall leave the matter there for the present.

There is just one further point that I would lightly touch upon before I close this all too brief a survey of the modern criticism of our Great Epic, namely, the question of the historicity of the work. Opinion is sharply divided on this point. The work claims itself to be an Itihāsa, a history; but criticism, both ancient and modern, has been loth to take this statement at its face value. Opinion has thus vacillated from the standpoint of categorical acceptance of perfect historicity to complete scepticism.

It was mentioned above that DAHLMANN had denied historical reality to the fable and toyed with the idea of symbolism. The polyandrous marriage especially, according to DAHLMANN, was but a symbol of the perfect unity of the Hindu joint family. The battle as depicted in the epic took place only in the imagination of the poet.

Before him, the Vedist LUDWIG, not finding any support for the story in the Vedic antiquity, had also tried to give a symbolic interpretation on the basis of a nature myth. In the seasonal myth of LUDWIG, the Pāṇḍavas symbolize the seasons; and Draupadī, their common spouse, is the dark earth possessed alternately by the five seasons. In time these "seasons" lose their wealth and hoarded gold (i.e. their lustre, splendour) in the fatal game of dice with the base Duryodhana, until at last their common wife, Kṛṣṇā, is left in possession of only a single garment (the earth becomes "bare," denuded, in winter). All this may be granted, for the sake of argument. But we fail to understand why any one should trouble to write about a seasonal myth in the form of a poem comprising 100,000 stanzas. Nor can LUDWIG explain the mystery : "warum und wodurch veranlaszt ein dichter auf diesen gedanken kam, wird natürlich immer ein rätsel bleiben." We may take it that LUDWIG has not been able to solve the riddle propounded by himself ; and we would be wise not to bother ourselves with it further.

Even before LUDWIG, LASSEN had tried his hand at giving a symbolical explanation of the story, which has not appealed to other scholars. The *dramatis personae* of the epic were not ordinary human beings ; they are to be understood rather as historical conditions or circumstances. Pāṇḍu (literally, pale, white) was not a person, but was originally the name of a royal family of the "White race," which had migrated into India from the north and which was later known in Sanskrit as Arjuna (literally, white). Pāṇḍu would thus represent the most ancient period of the history of the family and Arjuna the later. His name would accordingly belong to the order of other similar names : Śūra, Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇā, which represent not persons but circumstances and events. Passages were cited by LASSEN to show that Arjuna is the real representative of the other brothers. The name of his wife Subhadrā ("the harbinger of good fortune") is a happy expression for the close connection of the Pāṇḍavas with the people of Kṛṣṇa and of the descent of the later Pāṇḍava kings from a queen belonging to the family of the Yādavas.

A very novel interpretation of the epic we owe to Principal THADANI, Professor of English in the Hindu College of Delhi, embodied in an ambitious work comprising five volumes entitled *The Mystery of the Mahābhārata* : a difficult book which no layman can hope to understand. Professor THADANI is a philosopher and a poet. Accordingly his great work is both poetical and philosophical. It deepens and intensifies the "mystery" of the *Mahābhārata* rather than solves it. As a matter of fact I do not think that there is any real mystery in the *Mahābhārata* to solve. One has only to read the epic with a mind free from prepossessions, and the "mystery" dissolves of itself. However let us hear Professor THADANI himself. The whole story of the *Mahābhārata* is, according to this learned scholar, "but an account of the connection and conflict between the different systems of Hindu Philosophy and Religion." This is especially so in regard to the principal systems. Thus there is a conflict between principal Vedānta (Vaiṣṇavism) and principal Yoga (Śaivism); principal Yoga and principal Sāṁkhya (Buddhism and Jainism); principal Sāṁkhya and Principal Vedānta. This you will see is a perfect cycle of eternal conflicts! I give the next step in the argument in Professor THADANI's own words, lest I should unwittingly misrepresent his views. In all these cases, says the learned Professor, " there is a common ground of agreement between the opposing systems, without which no discussion can ever take place. And it is this that corresponds to a 'battle-field' in the language of war; for all debate may be liked to a combat, where each side, starting from some common point of agreement, marshals its array of arguments. All these points of view of the different systems of thought are examined in the Mahābhārata in story-form. Of these the most interesting as well as the most comprehensive conflict is between principal Vedanta and principal Saṅkhya, or Vaishnavism on the one hand and Buddhism and Jainism on the other,—and that is the subject-matter of the great 'battle' of Kurukshetra." In another place, Professor THADANI makes his meaning still clearer. The Great Epic is not a mere story of the deeds of mythological or historical gods or heroes; but "a wonderful explanation of all systems of Hindu Philosophy and Religion... which, when examined in the light of ancient method of Letter-analysis, reveals the great secret of its real meaning and mystery." Kṛṣṇa, according to this method of interpretation, represents Vadānta-Yoga-Vaiśeṣika. Droṇa as a teacher of Buddhism represents Vaiśeṣika-Nyāya. Draupadī is the sacrifice of the Mind and the senses and their objects, leading to God. This "letter-analysis" is a real magic wand in the hands of Professor THADANI. With the help of this mysterious instrument, the learned Professor gets the most astounding results. People have so long considered the Gambling Match as the most realistic and heart-rending scene of the whole

Mahābhārata, and some soft-hearted people must have even shed surreptitiously a few tears when reading the pathetic scene of the denudation of the noble Princess of Pāñcāla by the vicious Duḥśāsana. Professor THADANI brushes away all this shallow and misplaced sentimentality. "The word for gambling in the text," argues Professor THADANI, "is Dyūta (d, y, u, ta) meaning, (d) giving, (y) Buddhi, (u) woven with (u) the senses of knowledge, and (ta) the senses of Action. The Gambling Match is thus a discussion between Buddhi on the one hand (Yudhishthira), and the senses of Knowledge and Action, the basis of Jainism (Śakuni) on the other." A foreign critic has ungenerously remarked about the book that it is confusion worse confounded. I will not criticize this theory. Professor THADANI is right in insisting that for debate or discussion there must be a common ground of agreement between opposing views, without which a discussion is impossible. I have none with the learned Professor, nor have I had the good fortune of coming across anybody who had. Professor THADANI stands unchallenged.

I have mentioned these attempts at symbolical or allegorical interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* specially with a view to showing that writers starting from the most varied hypotheses and holding the most divergent views regarding the character and origin of the Great Epic of India have refused to see in it a plain and straightforward narrative, an unvarnished statement of facts, in short, a factitive history. They have endeavoured to look behind or beyond the facts narrated and see in the narrative some other purpose. Thus far they are certainly right. That different critics have given different interpretations of the same set of facts is in my opinion no reason for discrediting these efforts and for supposing that no such interpretations is possible. For one thing, the efforts mentioned above have been quite arbitrary, being supported by very flimsy arguments, without a basis either in the work itself or in the Indian tradition. The only thing that can be said about them is that they form undoubtedly a move in the right direction. For indeed many, if not most, great works of art and literature *are* filled with some sort of symbolism. I shall return to this question in the sequel.

Let us however in the meantime look at the matter from yet another angle. Is it not passing strange that, notwithstanding the repeated and dogged attempts of Western savants to demonstrate that our *Mahābhārata* is but an unintelligible conglomerate of disjointed pieces, without any meaning as a whole, the epic should always have occupied in Indian antiquity an eminent position and uniformly enjoyed the highest reputation? It was used, we are told, as a book of education for the young Bāṇa's time, like the *Iliad* in Hellenic Greece. It has inspired the poets and dramatists of India as a quarry for their plots and ideas. It has attracted in the past celebrated Indian philosophers like Ācārya Śaṁkara and Kumārila, famous Indian saints like Jnaneshwar and Ramdas, and distinguished Indian rulers like Akbar and Shivaji. This Epic of the Bhāratas had moreover penetrated to the farthest extremities of Greater India. It had conquered not only Burma and Siam, but even the distant islands of Java and Bali. The immortal stories of this epic have been carved on the walls of the temples of these people by their sculptors, painted on their canvasses by their artists, acted in their *wayongs* by their showmen.

What is more remarkable still is that this epic — along with the *Rāmāyaṇa* — is still living and throbbing in the lives of the Indian people, — not merely of the intelligentsia, but also of the illiterate and inarticulate masses, the "hewers of wood and the carriers of water." To such as these, as one foreign observer has pertinently observed, "the famous old stories are the music and colour of life. They are the perennial fount from which the oft-repeated draughts never quench and insatiable thirst." The grand legends of the Great War are even now recited and expounded in kings' palaces and in peasants' huts to an enraptured audience.

What is the secret of this book of which India feels after nearly two thousand years that she has not yet had enough? It would be a rather hazardous conjecture to suppose that such a thing might perchance happen also to the works of the *critics* of the *Mahābhārata*, for within less than half a century the lucubrations of these wiseacres have approached perilously near the limbo of oblivion, from which they are periodically snatched but by the industrious pedagogue and the curious antiquarian, eager to extend his knowledge of the history of literature. The epic obviously contains something — some elusive ideal — that produces this permanent and not transient quality of interest. Even OLDENBERG, who had pronounced the epic to be a chaos, felt — and rightly — that "in the Mahābhārata breathe the united soul of India and the individual souls of her people." It is a high claim, and yet the *Mahābhārata* may be said to be more even than that.

Modern scientists are interested in breaking the Atom, which we are told is a solar system in miniature, in order to release the captive energy for the exploitation of Nature. The Ṛṣis of ancient India were interested in breaking the tangled knot of personality, which is the very cosmos in miniature, in order to release the captive energy for the sublimation of Nature. The titanic painters of the colossal *Mahābhārata* canvass were all imbued with this idea, urged from within by this need, for they were the proud inheritors of that esoteric culture which made it possible to realize that ideal. Unseen but all pervasive in the life of every people is the great company of its ideals. And the *Mahābhārata* is the Golden Treasury of the Ideals of the Indians at their best. It is this fact which had attracted in the past the great philosophers, the great saints and the great rulers of India to the *Mahābhārata*. And we have not outlived that mighty book yet. On the contrary, we have yet to learn the lesson taught by that great book, that book of books, which offers to each what he needs and what he can digest.

How shall we then set about studying this great poem?

Higher Criticism would have us search for the lost "epic nucleus," which is apparently something immensely worth possessing. With that end in view it proceeds by the method of athetizing certain lines, passages, chapters, or even whole books. These are spurious, and all the rest is the work of one great poet. This method has been applied to comparatively more recent and also much simpler works, about whose historical context we happen to be better informed and where it would be much more legitimate. Yet even in these cases it has, as is well known, completely broken down. Very little reflection is needed to convince one that a mere process of stripping off what we regard as spurious will not automatically leave us with the pure and unalloyed "original." As we analyse the poem back towards its source, it proves to have not one source but many. What shall we do then? We know nothing about the hypothetical "nucleus." Moreover the nucleus we may discover in our analytical adventures is likely to prove to be not the "original" we are looking for, but merely a projection of our own feelings. On the other hand we have got the poem, about which there is no doubt, and we may be able to puzzle out a good deal about its meaning, its inner meaning, if we tried. Let us then focus out thoughts upon that and try to understand it as best as we can. I believe we shall find in the poem itself something far greater and nobler than the lost paradise of the primitive Kṣatriya tale of love and war, for which the Western savants have been vainly searching and which the Indian people had long outgrown and discarded.

LECTURE II

THE STORY ON THE MUNDANE PLANE

Whether we realize it or not, it remains a fact that we in India still stand under the spell of the *Mahābhārata*. There is many a different strand that is woven in the thread of our civilisation, reaching back into hoary antiquity. Amidst the deepest of them there is more than one that is drawn originally from the ancient Bhāratvarṣa and the Sanskrit literature. And well in the centre of this vast pile of Sanskrit literature stands this monumental book of divine inspiration, unapproachable and far removed from possibilities of human competition.

This dateless and deathless poem, which had evoked throughout Indian antiquity such wide interest and which forms the strongest link between India old and new, — what is it, what is this miracle of a book ?

The learned philologist of the present day feels a deal of hesitation in answering this question, which to the unsophisticated Indian would present no difficulty whatsoever. If questioned, the latter will no doubt promptly and confidently answer that the *Mahābhārata* is a divine work recounting the war-like deeds of his ancestors, the god-like heroes of a past age, the unrighteous Kauravas on the one hand and the righteous Pāṇḍavas aided by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the other, — of the Golden Age when gods used to mingle with men, when the people were much better off, much happier, than they are today. And the illiterate Indian is right, to a very large extent, as he far more often is than his "educated" brother. For, the *Mahābhārata*, as the poem itself tells us, arises out of the following question of Janamejaya addressed to the great Ṛṣi Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa on the occasion of the snake sacrifice (1.54.19):

> *kathaṁ samabhavad bhedas teṣām akliṣṭakāriṇām /*
> *tac ca yuddhaṁ kathaṁ vṛttam bhūtāntakaraṇaṁ mahat //*

"How arose the quarrel among those men of unblemished deeds? How occurred that great war which was the cause of the destruction of so many beings?"

It seems at first sight exceedingly strange that the answer to so simple and innocent a question should run into 100,000 couplets or 200,000 lines, a bulk which is eight times as great as that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together, and three and half times that of the entire *Bible*. But even a cursory perusal of the work is sufficient to show one that its prodigious size is really due to the fact that, after the fashion of ancient literature, a thousand other tales and a mass of didactic material have been embedded in the interestices of the main narrative. The story winds its way leisurely, but with a steady aim, through masses of elaborate treatises on law, philosophy, religion, custom, even geography and cosmography, together with a formidable array of episodes and legends, piled up at various distances along its course. At places these digressions crowd together, rising up in big imposing piles, as in the Āraṇyaka, Śānti and Anuśāsana parvans; sometimes they are far and few between, when the story advances at a more rapid — and, to us, congenial — pace, as in the Sabhā, Virāṭa, Sauptika and Strī parvans. These excursions do not in reality disturb the archetectonic beauty and harmony of the composition as a whole, though at first sight they may appear to do so. For, as PISANI has pointed out, at least the longer ones of these digressions have been introduced into the story in such a manner as to fill up "temporal hiatuses" consisting of uneventful years, hiatuses which are bound to occur in a very detailed and elaborate narrative covering a period of nearly two centuries. Notwithstanding the frequent — and, to us, often tedious — interruptions, the great drama moves on full of animation and colour, steadily, from one end of the poem to the other. The question of the exact relationship between the story (properly so called) on the one hand and the episodes and the didactic material on the other will occupy us later. In the meantime let us have a look at the story itself, which, like a thin thread running through a necklace, holds together loosely the diverse jewels, polished and unpolished, which make up the Epic of the Bhāratas.

The central narrative, which has rightly been regarded as the Indian national saga, is a remarkably well told story of a great war said to have been waged in ancient times for the throne of Hastināpura, the grand old capital of India, between two royal families of cousins and their friends and allies. Thus the central theme of the poem is, as in the Greek *Iliad* and the German *Nibelungenlied*, the tragedy of a futile and terrible war of annihilation. As a help to the discussion which is to follow, I will recount very briefly the main events.

* * *

It will be seen that the story which has been very briefly and inadequately summarized above, centres round the fortunes of two rival branches of a royal family, whose jealousies and quarrels lead finally to a devastating war, which ends in an all but complete extinction of that large family along with the allies and supporters of both sides. It is, *prima facie*, a tale of a common fratricidal war for the possession of a throne, one of those murderous strifes which have been common in India and which have disfigured the pages of human history probably ever since there have been thrones to fight for. Notwithstanding that the theme is trivial and uninspiring, the story was told in such a way as to hold the reader, or rather the listener, perpetually in thrall. Stalwart intrepid warriors, beautiful courageous women, pious unworldly saints move to and fro in a glittering mêlée across the scenes of the poem, which abounds in inexhaustible details of Indian social, political and religious life, minute descriptions of ancient weapons and similar details. In spite of superficial deficiences such as prolixity, occasional differences and breaks of style and structure, the poem reveals abundant skill and creative power in dramatic composition. It is above all characterized by extraordinary vividness and richness of imagination.

It is this intensity of imagination which is the secret of the popular appeal of the *Mahābhārata*. For, it is the strength and fulness of imaginative faculty which makes a poet's work "real," as we might say. It is the intensity of imagination which works the miracle of bringing past scenes and characters before the mind of the reader with a wondrous reality. It spontaneously generates the feeling that we are in a different world and a world full of real — or at least semi-real — beings, who have the virtue of being able to interest us and to set vibrating a delicate chord of sympathy somewhere within us. The value to us of a work of art or literature depends, I think, primarily on two factors: firstly, the intensity with which we are transported to a new world; and, secondly, the nature of the world to which we are transported.

Consider for a moment the following description of Kṛṣṇā, the heroine of the poem, popularly known as Draupadī, she being the daughter of Drupada, king of the Pāñcālas:

vedīmadhyāt samutpannā padmapatranibhekṣaṇā /
darśanīyānavadyāṅgī sukumārā manasvinī //

These winged words flying like arrows straight to the mark carry us with them to a new world and a beautiful world. The heroine, they tell us, sprang from an altar, the sacrificial fire-altar. Have you noticed that there can be no creation without a sacrifice? We consume, that is sacrifice, foodstuffs, and thereby create vital energy necessary for life. We have to sacrifice, liberally, men and material in the fire of ambition in order to create the phantom of an empire. When we transform physical energy, we sacrifice one form of energy for another. The whole order of creation turns on sacrifice. The awful purity of Kṛṣṇā, which was due to the sacrifice performed by her parents, was itself the cause of the rich and rare beauty with which she was dowered by Nature. She had a form exceedingly delicate and her limbs were faultless. Her beautiful eyes had the velvety softness and the subdued glow of the elongated lotus petal. She was "endowed with mind" (manasvinī), that is, she was intelligent, high-minded, determined. She was, in other words, a pure stainless virgin with a noble, exalted mind.

We are introduced to another character of the drama, the highsouled preceptor of the Bhāratas in the science of arms. the venerable Ācārya Droṇa, white-robed, with a white sacrificial thread, white sandal marks and garlands, with white locks crowning his head (1.124.17):

> *tataḥ śuklāmbaradharaḥ śuklayajñopavītavān /*
> *śuklakeśaḥ sitaśmaśruḥ śuklamālyānulepanaḥ //*

The white colour has been emphasized, intentionally, the colour of purity and equanimity. The preceptor of the Kurus was devoid of unworthy sentiments, such as uncontrolled anger, greed and lust, and incapable of unworthy actions, and therefore a fit person for being entrusted with the education of the young and inexperienced princes.

Yet another character of this tragic drama is the ill-fated Karṇa whom Pṛthā yet unwedded bore. He was like a tusker in his fury, like the sun in noon-tide brilliance, like the all-consuming fire, lion-like in build and muscle, stately as a golden palm (1. 126. 4 f.);

> *siṁharṣabhagajendrāṇāṁ tulyavīryaparākramaḥ /*
> *dīptikāntidyutiguṇaiḥ sūryendujvalanopamaḥ //*

We are introduced in another place to two expert mace-fighters of this epic world, Duryodhana and Bhīma, wielding their powerful maces and facing each other in a mock fight, ranging in circles the spacious arena, like two intoxicated bulls (1. 124. 32):

> *tau pradakṣiṇasavyāni maṇḍalāni mahābalau /*
> *ceratur nirmalagadau samadāv iva govṛṣau //*

This little tourney at which the two mace-fighters meet in friendly rivalry, with only the people of Hāstināpura as spectators, was but a prelude in a minor key to the mighty symphony, roaring out its diapasons, those grand swelling bursts of harmony rising out of discords, which was going to be played on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra for the delectation of the gods, who love to watch from their aerial cars these combats between justice and injustice, between good and evil, and rejoice in the victory of the good and the just.

Here is a vivid scene in which one angry chieftain severs with his discus the head of a mighty-armed wicked warrior, who thereupon falls down like a thunder-riven mountain (2. 42. 21):

evaṁ uktvā Yaduśreṣṭhāś Cedirājasya tatkṣaṇāt /
vyapāharac chiraḥ kruddhaś cakreṇāmitrakarṣaṇaḥ /
sa papāta mahābāhur vajrāhata ivācalaḥ /

Who that has once read his *Mahābhārata* freely, untroubled by difficulties of language, can forget the tall Āryan warrior standing erect like the standard of Indra (Indradhvaja ivocchritaḥ), wearing leathern arm-protectors and finger-guards (baddhagodhāṇgulitrāṇaḥ), with his bow bent into a complete circle (maṇḍalīkṛtakārmukah), and carrying in his quiver long straight-flying arrows feathered with Kaṅka plumes (kaṅkapatrair ajihmagaiḥ)? Can he ever forget their shining chariots bright as the sun (rathenādityavarcasā), upholstered with tiger skins (vaiyāghraparivāraṇaiḥ), and garlanded with net-works of little tinkling bells (kiṁkiṇījālamālinaḥ); or their palaces redolent with the fragrance of sandalwood and scented aloe; or their pleasure parks bright with variegated lotus blossoms and frequented by flocks of flamingoes, kāraṇḍavas and cakravākas? He remembers unforgettably those thickly wooded penance-groves of anchorites of rigid vows, covered with thick carpets of wild flowers (puṣpasaṁstarasaṁsṛtāḥ), echoing the hum of bees (ṣaṭpadodgītasaṁghuṣṭāḥ) sheltering birds of various kinds and harbouring even rutting elephants, ferocious tigers and king cobras, with their fire sanctuaries resounding with the holy recitation of Vedir chants (puṇyasvādhyāyasaṁghuṣṭāḥ). When he recalls those scenes, pictures surge through his mind also of the bright little cities of the heroic age, garlanded on festive days with penons and banners, and thronging with youths and maidens wearing highly polished bejewelled kuṇḍalas and gaily waiving their kerchieves and scarves. He will remember even little details like the blooming kiṁśuka trees, the red Aśoka blossoms and the fragrant Lodhra forests dear to the heart of lovers (lodhraiḥ kāmijanapriyaiḥ), so pregnant are their aromas and associations.

Let us turn for a moment from the amphitheatre of our grand epic to the side show of a little romantic episode, the Tale of Nala and Damayantī, one of the brightest gems in the golden treasury of Sanskrit verse. Who that has once read the beautiful tale of Nala can forget the golden swans which carried stealthily, unknown to anybody, the secret messages of the heart of the lovelorn Damayantī; or the noble steeds which were made by Nala to go down softly on their knees, as a gesture of homage to the gods, before starting on their eventful journey? Can a thoughtful reader forget how Nala entered Kuṇḍinapura, filling the directions with the rattle of his chariot? The familiar clatter was noticed by his own pensive horses long pent up in their new stables, who were thrilled by it. It was heard by the elephants tethered in their spacious stalls, and by the peacocks perched on palace tops, who raised their heads eagerly and, looking around, cried gleefully, thinking it was the rumbling of dark thunder-clouds at the welcome approach of the rainy season.

The great secret of the charm of the style of our epic is the remarkable condensation of thought and extreme vividness of expression achieved by the judicious use of well chosen similes and metaphors. Here are a few examples to show what I mean. Quickness of retaliation and deadly enmity are visualized, in a flash as it were, by the felicitous image of the snake struck by a staff (daṇḍāhata ivoragaḥ). Instantaneously the ire of the snake is aroused, and he neither forgets nor forgives, cherishing life-long enmity. The facility with which a warrior disperses his enemies is revealed by the parallel of the wind scattering clouds in the skies (divīvābhrāṇi mārutaḥ). The ease and quickness with which he annihilates them are expressed vividly by the symbol of fire destroying a heap of cotton (tūlarāśim ivānalaḥ). The willing self-immolation of warriors fascinated by the din and turmoil of the combat, throwing themselves headlong in the thick of the fray, is brought home to us by the illustration of moths falling in a fire (yathā pradiptam jvalanam pataṁgāh). A young effeminate knight, partaking in a desperate and confused *mêlée,* appears to an experienced old veteran watching him " like a foam upon the billow when the mighty storm-winds roar." We are made to realize the utter inviolability and the fiery energy of a chaste woman, when outraged, by the picture of the kindled flame of a burning fire (dīptām agniśikhām iva), which one cannot trifle with without being scorched.

The last simile reminds me how frequently fire figures in the similes and metaphors of these poets. I have put together the following few as typical illustrations: didhakṣann iva pāvakaḥ, tam dīptam iva kālāgnim, bhasmachanna ivānalaḥ, tam jvalantam iva śriyā, jājvalyamānam vapuṣā, ṛddhyā prajvalamānena, alātacakravat sainyānām, kruddham agnim yathā vanaṁ, kālāgnir iva mūrtimān, kālotsṛṣṭām prajvalitām ivolkāṁ.

The number of these examples can be increased easily. But I will not weary you with further instances, for a bald list of phrases is wearying. These very phrases in the hands of our epic poets, placed with consummate art in appropriate settings, have a very different effect. The entire poem appears thereby shot through with fiery splendour: fire and light wringing with and subduing powers of darkness and ignorance. I do not suppose for an instant that these metaphors and similes were used by the epic bards with any special intent or that they were conscious of using them even. It was the spontaneous and inevitable product of their burning zeal and their fiery imagination.

We are reminded of the epithet jalanamitte (jvalanamitraḥ) applied by the poet Vākpati to the great dramatist Bhāsa, the " Friend of Fire." Well, our epic poets appear to have been just such "friends of fire," and that probably in a very literal and concrete sense. That would not be very surprising either, if the Bhṛgus did have a hand in the shaping of this remarkable poem, as I believe and have tried to show elsewhere. For, like Prometheus who stole fire from Olympus and taught men the use of it, the Bhṛgus, the priests of the firecult, are credited by Indian tradition with having discovered fire, who was hiding, and brought it to mankind (Ṛv. 10. 46. 2):

guhā carantam uśijo namobhir
icchanto dhīrā Bhṛgavo 'vindan /

"Worshipping, seeking him with adoration, the wise Bhṛgus, yearning in their hearts, found him where he was lurking."

Our poets knew how to relieve the severity of the highly wrought verses by a sparing use of musical effects. In the midst of a long series of ślokas of the severe epic pattern, we are agreeably surprised by the sudden appearance of alliterative phrases like aśoko śokanāśanaḥ, bhīmo bhīmaparākramaḥ, bhrukuṭīkuṭilānanaḥ, mattamātaṅgagāminam, jagrāhājagaro grāhaḥ, satoya iva toyadaḥ (2. 16. 42), nadīr nadanadīpatiḥ (2. 17. 16). Alliteration adds unction to the interested question addressed by a gallant to a young charmer: kāsi kasyāsi kalyaṇi. Sound follows sense in niḥśvasantaṁ punaḥ punaḥ, used to describe deep panting repeated breaths. We have again an admirable example of the phonetic imitation of motion, stumbling, falling and dying in (B. 7. 146. 86):

babhramuś caskhaluḥ petuḥ sedur mamluś ca Bhārata /

This series of glowing word-pictures and sound-pictures fashioned with remarkable skill and superb craftsmanship serves to bring the scenes and characters of this fascinating drama before the mind of the reader with wondrous reality and imprint them indelibly on his memory. We cannot help unconsciously identifying ourselves until we almost believe that we are indeed hearing and seeing the things of which we are reading.

And how irresistibly we are carried away to this new world! We can take a critical view and argue that it was a world as ugly and unjust and cruel as ours. Psychologists might tell us that these fanciful creations of poets and seers are but examples of compensation, of substitute or vicarious gratification. The Ego, they say, is for ever dissatisfied with the reality, especially with the small quota of happiness that is his alotted share in real life, and he makes up the deficit by freely imagining fictitious persons who have in abundance whatever he himself lacks and by identifying himself with them, being at the same time blissfully unconscious that he is doing so. The psychologists are probably right. And yet how fondly we cling to these dreams, which the poet by virtue of the intensity of his imaginative faculty has succeeded in endowing with the reality of life. We cling to the heroes and heroines of the epics especially so tenaciously because they are more splendid than any created by other men. Were there ever such valiant and self-sacrificing men, such beautiful and virtuous women, souls of such purity and power ? It is a fairy world to which the poets transport us, and every remotest corner of it is interesting and vivid, every commonest experience in it shares somehow in the beauty and grandeur of the whole.

From the consideration of the contents let us turn for a moment, in passing, to the question of the medium of these thoughts and ideas, with which the former is intimately connected. The medium is, as is well known, the old venerable language of the Vedic Aryans, Sanskrit, the miraculous heaven-sent tongue which was the wonder and awe of Indian writers ever afterwards. At a very conservative estimate it continued to be the language of literature and culture in India for nearly three millenia, naturally adjusted from time to time to conform with changes in the milieu and provenance of its speakers. This inherited Vedic idiom was moulded by the epic poets to suit their own purpose, and what a really potent and readily adaptable instrument they have made out of it. With this new acquisition the poets are hardly ever at a loss for a word to suit the metrical context or the tonal pattern aimed at, or to bring out the nuances intended by them. The stores of the poets seem always full and brimming. For example, if the poet wants to speak about the king, there was no need to keep on repeating the word rājan, the common word for king, in stanza after stanza. He has a large stock of synonyms to choose from. He has in his store a monosyllabic consonantal stem rāj, which can be used at the end of a compound, as in nagarāj. Or if that does not suit him, he can use short words like nṛpa or bhūpa, ending in a vowel ; or bhūbhṛt, kṣmābhṛt, ending in a consonant. He has at his disposal also a large number of longer words like nṛpati, bhūpati, bhūmipa, adhipa, pārthiva, rājanya, kṣatriya, mahīkṣit, and so on. He can make words of four syllables like narādhipa, bhūmipati, kṣitipati, the latter with a row of four light syllables. He can even make up a word of five syllables like pṛthivīpāla, avanipati, the latter again with a row of five light syllables. And that, I am sure, does not by any means exhaust the list. I have picked out for the sake of illustration some of the commonest synonyms that have stuck to my memory. This amazing — I may say, unparallelled — richness of vocabulary enables the epic poets to paint continuous series of word-pictures of abundant variety and mellifluent tonal effects, illuminating at the same time diverse aspects and relations of the persons and objects described.

While we are on the topic of the linguistic medium I cannot resist the temptation of making a slight digression and saying a few words about the śloka, the epic metre par excellence. To my mind the creation and perfection of the epic śloka are among the outstanding achievements of the epic poets.

The capital difficulty of the epic in any language is the discovery of a measure which could be employed, continuously, in very long stretches of poetry and which would not grow monotonous. It has been my experience — I cannot say whether it is shared by you — that the reading of most epics tends to become sooner or later very tiring, if not exhausting. There are only two peoples in the world, to my knowledge, who have succeeded in evolving a simple and elegant measure that can be used in lengthy poems continuously and yet owing to its endless variety appears ever new. And these peoples are the Indians and the Greeks.

I shall speak only of the Indian metre. In the Indian śloka the basic component is a tetrad (that is a group of four syllables) — as, in fact, in most of the old Indian metres — and the śloka consists of an asymmetrical combination of four *pairs* of tetrads. The first two of these tetrad-pairs form an organic whole, and constitute one line of the śloka, consisting of sixteen syllables. The line itself is made of two halves, which may be called the front half and the back half, and which stand in antithetical relation to each other. The other half of this distich or couplet is a duplicate of this line, having the same cadence (which is invariably diiambic), but with a rhythm or scansion which may be entirely different. This variability arises from the fact that the quantity of the first four syllables of each of the two octosyllabic halves of any line or verse is always, theoretically at any rate, perfectly free; the quantity of only the four final syllables of these two halves being to some extent restricted. Originally these four final syllables of each of the two halves of the śloka-line were prevailingly iambic, as in the Vedic Anuṣṭubh ; and this measure was quite suitable for the short emotional religious litanies for which it was primarily employed. But it would have been quite inadequate for the long continuous passages of the epopee, with a descriptive or narrative content ; for, an interminable row of purely iambic pādas would have proved monstrously monotonous.

The genius of the creators of the epic śloka consists, it seems to me, in their restricting the iambic character (⏑ – ⏑ –) to the even pādas or the back halves, in other words, to the real cadence of the śloka-line ; and making on the other hand the odd pādas or the front halves pointedly non-iambic, prevailingly of the type ⏑ — — —. The real secret of the extraordinary charm and vitality of the epic śloka is thus due, I think, to the fact that the śloka, which as explained above is built up with a series of eight tetrads is nevertheless a progressive measure that appears to be constantly aiming at iambic rhythm but succeeds in achieving it through a series of obstacles. You will realize that, if you observe that the dynamic pattern underlying the metrical sequence of the above mentioned eight tetrads of the epic śloka is : free, non-iambic, free, iambic and then again free, non-iambic, free, iambic. The two iambic cadences of the stanza serve to characterize the measure as an iambic rhythm, while the four free elements provide abundant variety, ensuring against rigid monotony and unpleasant fixity. I have calculated that there are actually.... permutations possible with this scheme of the sequence of long and short syllables. You can imagine what a tremendous variety of rhythms one can obtain with this scheme. It appears to approximate to the freedom of the modern *vers libre*, free verse, unfettered alike by rhyme or rhythm, and yet it is perfectly regulated as regards the number of syllables in the whole stanza as well as in each of its four quarters, with a hypermetric variety arising out of the resolution of an initial long into two short syllables, as in prakṛtir guṇān vikurute. Naturally not all permutations are of equal value: many of them have perhaps never been employed in the epic at all; quite a large number of them are probably sporadic; and a few are no doubt rare. There yet remains a sufficient number in common use to ensure variety and elasticity and to obviate the monotony of a rigid octosyllabic scheme, which would have made the recitation of 100,000 stanzas an ordeal both to the reciter and the audience.

Though the intensity of imagination of the epic poets and the perfected form of expression have made the work real, spontaneous and convincing, and therefore absorbingly interesting, it is really in the conception of character which it reveals that the epic becomes most significant.

The chief actors in the great Mahābhārata drama are distinctly and consistently characterized. The Pāṇḍavas, with the single exception of Bhīma, are represented as just, moderate and generous; even Bhīma is not ungenerous, though somewhat hot-tempered and burdened with an unshakable confidence in his herculean strength. The Kauravas on the other hand are described as envious, arrogant and malignant. All the characters are drawn with a steady hand and a firm conviction. Arjuna and Bhīma, Bhīṣma, Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Droṇa and Śakuni, Draupadī and Gāndhāri, remain the same in all the eighteen books of the epic. As DAHLMANN has shown, the characteristics once chosen are preserved, and become only clearer as the drama develops and reaches its natural denouement. In Yudhiṣṭhira, we find charity, peace and self-control, leaning towards weakness and ineptitude; in Duryodhana, determination combined with envy, hate, cruelty and unscrupulousness; in Bhīma recklessness and wild impetuosity; in Arjuna dignity, chivalry and prudent heroism; in Karṇa pride, arrogance and malignity, with a strange streak of generosity ; in Dhṛtarāṣṭra pernicious weakness and complaisance ; in Śakuni and Duḥśāsana unmitigated wickedness and audacity ; in Vidura and Droṇa sense of justice and loyalty ; in Bhīṣma nobility, benevolence, asceticism and detachment ; in Draupadī gracious womanhood, staunch loyalty and purity of character.

The high-water mark of epic idealism is reached in the magnificent conception of the Perfect Man, which has never been equalled in the whole range of epic poetry, the character of Devavrata Bhīṣma, son of king Śaṁtanu. This central character of the *Mahābhārata* fulfils a very subtle demand. He is placed by birth and circumstances in the station of a warrior and a king. Now the duties of a warrior imply the constant and relentless use of concentrated force ; and those of a king the guardianship of manifold and diverse interests. But both these functions must be performed with a spirit of detachment, from a mere sense of duty, divorced from all personal interest, unmixed with motives of self-love, self-indulgence, self-aggrandisement, in fact all motives — especially hidden motives — which bear the vicious trade mark of "self." Admittedly, to act in this fashion is an exceedingly difficult task, one of those to which later Indian poets gave the name of "the vow of the sword-edge" (asidhārāvrata). But that is the first step in the perfection of character. It must be observed — and even emphasized — that interest is not to be eliminated. Far from it. Interest must be there and quite as intense as in the ordinary man ; only the element of "self" — that is the "lower self" — is to be eliminated. That is virtually what may be styled "Gītā Spirit" : selfless work, abandonment of the fruit of action, active renunciation. Call it what you like. The name matters little. It is what you do that matters ; and above all *how* you do it, with what *motive*. Whether one is actuated by any of those unworthy sentiments mentioned above, one can easily find out for oneself : it needs only a little honest heart-searching introspection. The "Inner Monitor" (antaryāmin) registers silently but quite accurately the ethical value of every action ; and gives a prompt, candid and unerring answer every time he is asked, because he is a constant and sleepless witness, and he is moreover afraid of nobody in this world or beyond it.

We have an illuminating analysis of the character of this rich saga figure from the pen of the gifted author of the *Web of Indian Life*. The discipleship of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had given Sister NIVEDITA an unerring insight into the intricacies of Indian life and culture. It is therefore not surprising to find that this devoted pupil of the Swami had a clearer vision of the real inner significance of the *Mahābhārata* than many a Mahābhārata specialist. These experts do indeed possess great erudition and can command huge stacks of neatly classified index-cards on every conceivable topic, but they lack, as a rule, the sympathetic imagination which is necessary for understanding most ancient traditional books. Sister NIVEDITA who was gifted with that spirit of imaginative sympathy has shown us the way to appreciate the subtle and consummate modelling of this titanic figure, which embodies one of the supreme ideals of the Indian people. It was mentioned above that Bhīṣma is intended for the type of a king and a knight. In order that he may expose to view all the greatness of character that is possible to man in these conditions, this noble scion of a royal family is made to renounce of his own accord, at the beginning of his life, the kingdom which is his by right in favour of the issues of a fisher-girl whom his father wanted to marry, renouncing at the same time the right of marriage also, with a view to avoiding possibilities of future dissensions in the family. The sacrifice is so vital and the provocation to it so trivial that when the son of king Śaṁtanu made this vow, flowers rained down from the sky on Devavrata and invisible voices were heard from all directions murmurring the words “Bhīṣma! Bhīṣma!”. Thus he got his nickname Bhīṣma, “the Terrible.” From this point, having set aside the joys and the privileges of a parent and a sovereign, he is made to bear to the full the responsibilities of both. He has not merely to bring up his own half-brothers (who die prematurely), but also the sons and the grandsons of these, acting as their guardian and ruling the kingdom as regent during their minority. As we are nowadays accustomed to safe-guard first of all our own rights and privileges and to skip lightly over the duties and obligations attached to them, we are apt to regard as something obsolete and old-fashioned this high ideal — this inhuman sense of duty — visualized in the figure of Bhīṣma by the fashioners of our national epic.

Bhīṣma's attitude towards and behaviour during the Great War, which have been commonly misunderstood, were also striking and worthy of note. From his high position as the head of the great Kuru family Bhīṣma fulfils his duty as adviser by giving fearlessly and in an outspoken and unambiguous manner such counsel as he considered consonant with the dictates of truth and justice, trying to curb the rapacious policy of the hot-headed and truculent sons of the weak and indulgent Dhṛtarāṣṭra and to maintain peace between the warring cousins. But when against his advice and solemn warnings, war is decided on by the dominant party at the Kaurava court, Bhīṣma, despite his firm conviction in the matter of the justice of the Pāṇḍava cause, obeys, like a soldier, the call of the monarch and accepts, without any mental reservations, the position of the generalissimo of the Kaurava forces. In this capacity he fights valiantly and whole-heartedly, disposing his forces to their best advantage. Notwithstanding his unshakable belief in the ultimate victory of his opponents, he strikes not a single blow more or less for this consideration, carrying out his pledge to the best of his ability and powers. He fights nobly, like a god, with a calm head and a warm loving heart.

His end is remarkable and the only one that is described at great length in the *Mahābhārata.* On the tenth day of the battle, after performing prodigies of valour, Bhīṣma falls at sunset, succumbing to the injuries he had sustained in the war. At his death the din of battle suddenly ceased and the warriors laid down their weapons ; the sun grew dim and the earth bewailed his fall. The chieftains of both armies, putting off their armour and forgetting the hatred and anger which had entered their souls, approached him reverently and did him homage ; and he greeted them all equally with blessings. Though he was tortured by his wounds and burning with fever, yet prevailing over his agonies by sheer force of will, he applied himself to Yoga in his last moments. The epic tells us that the gratified soul of his happy father had given him the boon that death would never come to him as long as he desired to live. And we can quite easily credit that he had such power. This mighty man had vanquished Māra — had conquered and sublimated the indomitable urge of sex, — and therefore he could hold even death at bay. Lying on the bed of arrows where he had fallen on the battlefield, he had refused to be moved, scorning medicaments and surgical aid and even the comfort of a soft bed. In extreme bodily discomfort, with his head hanging down, the only thing he asked for was a pillow. But when they brought soft downy pillows such as he had used in the luxurious surroundings of his palatial residence, he put them laughingly aside, asking for a pillow such as is fit for a warrior. Only Arjuna, whom he loved dearly and who loved him dearly, understood what he wanted. Blinded with tears, Arjuna took three keen shafts out of his inexhaustible quiver and transfixed them in the earth so as to support the drooping head of the dying immortal, giving him a pillow becoming his bed of arrows :

> " Such a pillow well beseems a Kṣatriya
> Who all his life had walked uprightly, not
> Transgressing the immortal laws of God,
> Keeping his body stainless from desire
> Of carnal lust........"

This unconquered and unconquerable Titan lay there on the bed of arrows to pay his last debt of agony with the body which, though consistently with its own exigencies, had yet fought against righteousness, waiting patiently the appointed end, the willing victim of his couch of pain. Such was the end of this mighty man.

This character was evidently the creation of a race of confirmed Stoics, who, inculcating rigid control of passions and complete indifference to the principles of pleasure and pain, teach us to regard detachment as a necessary element of moral grandeur. It is obviously this race of men who had dashed forward, far ahead of their fellow beings, in the stern competition of human development and progress and who had brought civilization and culture to the people of this subcontinent, dragging them, out of sheer pity for their fate, from out of the mire of mental sloth and the pitfalls of pitiful indulgence.

When we have realized this, the ingenious suggestion of some very advanced critics of the *Mahābhārata* that this idealistic picture which we find in the epic must needs be a distortion of the original saga, since there could be no question of renunciation of a claim to the throne in a primitive epoch which did not recognize the right of primogeniture, — or the equally audacious view of Higher Criticism that in the original "epic nucleus," in strict accordance with the custom of levirate (niyoga), nobody but Bhīṣma could have been "appointed" to procreate children on the windows of his deceased brothers, — these propositions, I say, strike us by their complete vacuity and absolute inanity. They do not help us in any way to understand this remarkable legacy of ancient India to the modern man, but serve merely to reveal the utter bankruptcy of modern literacy criticism and to convince us of the futile spirit of vandalism which animates modern critics.

Few characters in ancient literature have been painted with such consummate skill and insight into human nature as Mahārathī Karṇa, a character which in the past has never been properly understood — has in fact been consistently misunderstood — though the epic has furnished us with details of his life with remarkable fulness, candour and clarity. The most significant factor of his life-history, which is generally ignored or glossed over by modern writers but which has far-reaching consequences, is that he was born out of wedlock and therefore cast away at his birth. The epic tells us in so many words that he came into the world as an indirect and undesired consequence of the almost irresistible curiousity (kautūhala) of his mother, Kuntī, who, while yet an unmarried virgin living in the house of her parents, in her youthful indiscretion operated with a secret sexual charm which had been given to her by an erratic and irascible sage. The charm worked — to her surprise and dismay. On the god appearing before her in person in obedience to the call to satisfy her desire, she was frightened and begged him earnestly to depart and not compel her to become the mother of his son. But her entreaties were of no avail, because her suitor, the sun-god, would not be dissuaded from his purpose. Against her will and intention a child was born of her, refulgent as the sun, strong as though made of iron, and clad in natural armour, which was a sign of his invincibility. In great sorrow the young maiden took the radiant child of the sun-god, under cover of darkness, to the river-side and putting it in a bejewelled casket set it afloat on the river and left it to its destiny. The child was picked up on the outskirts of the enclave of the high-brow Society and brought up lovingly by the nameless Superintendent of Royal Chariots (Adhiratha) and his wife Rādhā. This is a plain and unvarnished story of the "unwanted child," a familiar figure of romantic literature, and the behaviour of the child when it grows up to manhood is absolutely correct to type.

This unfortunate foundling, not wanted by Society and sheltering itself under the wings of its foster parents, turns naturally, as soon as it gets the opportunity, to revenge itself on the Society, which had rudely thrust it aside, while still helpless, for no fault of its own. Karṇa's enmity is unconsciously but inevitably directed against his own brothers, the Pāṇḍavas, who have robbed him, equally unconsciously but irrevocably, of all the good things of life : wealth, position and the good opinion of society. But it is focussed especially against their common wife Draupadī, the visible embodiment of their worldly enjoyment and happiness, — the divine Draupadī who would have been his, had he not been unceremoniously cast away in his childhood. Driven by an inner necessity, he equips himself for the coming conflict, applying himself avidly to the acquisition of proficiency in the handling of arms along with his brothers and cousins, and easily excels everybody except his younger brother, Arjuna. Arjuna thus becomes another object of his special hatred and enmity. At the royal tournament, which had been arranged to test the proficiency of the young princes in martial accomplishments, he encounters his first public humiliation. He challenges Arjuna to a single combat, thinking that he would score an easy victory over his rival, but the friends of Arjuna evade the fight on the ground that Karṇa is not the equal of Arjuna in birth, the challenger being a parvenu, not fit to compete with princes with blue blood flowing in their veins. Karṇa resents to the death this slight levelled at his birth. The conflict could not however be avoided; it was only postponed. Arjuna had to take up the challenge many years later, when Karṇa again faces him, as the generalissimo of the Kaurava forces. And Karṇa and Arjuna meet then, not in mock fight as now in Hāstinapura, but in a mortal combat on the field of Kurukṣetra. In the meanwhile Karṇa gives his ego full rein. His wounded vanity drives him to amass wealth, power and allies to help him in his secret vendetta. He attaches himself to the Kaurava court and plays willingly second fiddle to Duryodhana in order to have an opportunity to dispossess those who had dispossessed him. His inferiority complex makes him oppose and insult the noble Bhīṣma, who is to him the hateful symbol of smug decorum and prudery.

Karṇa was generous to a fault. But his generosity, which has become proverbial, was but a pose, albeit an unconscious pose, a clever artifice to outdo the accredited nobility in their vaunted virtue, liberality, and to hear himself lauded to the skies by the begging fraternity, as a compensation for the taunts and sneers of the highbrow nobles, at the Kaurava court, proud of their birth. He had no true generosity of heart. With his frustration complex un-resolved, he was incapable of real sacrifice or true charity. He joins with secret pleasure the ribald crowd at the court of Hāstinapura during the fateful game of dice in relentlessly humiliating and persecuting the innocent Draupadī, who had herself done him no harm at any time. Again, when his mother, Kuntī, reveals to him his identity and beseeches him tearfully, on the eve of the *Bhārata* war, to be reconciled with the Pāṇḍavas, who were his own brothers, and thus help to stop the carnage which was about to take place, he remains unmoved, parading his obligations towards his foster parents and loyalty to his benefactor, Duryodhana. His pose of unbounded generosity leads in the end to his own undoing. Taking advantage of his vow of not refusing any request of a Brahmin, Indra, in the guise of a

Brahmin mendicant, begs of him his natural coat of mail and his precious ear-rings, which had rendered him invincible. Karṇa is on the horns of a dilemma. To be or not to be : should he break his vow, as the sun-god, his putative father, had exhorted him to do ; or should he surrender his invincibility ? Characteristically he disobeys his father and chooses the second alternative. He hugs still more closely round himself the pretentious cloak of generosity and parts with his precious possessions, with apparent nonchalance. Were he capable of analyzing his motives and realizing that his vow of charity was but a sham pose, as the sun-god had evidently recognized, he would have known himself as he was and could have remained invincible. But that was not to be : indeed that could not be. For, the Ego in its conflict with the Self i.e. Superself, cannot remain invincible. One can inflate the Ego tremendously, inflate it frightfully, but not indefinitely. Nature has set limits everywhere. When inflated beyond a certain limit the bubble bursts. Who or what bursts it ? It creates itself and brings into operation a subtle force that bursts it. The force, being just sufficient for the purpose, seeks out and attacks the very weakest point of the bubble. It is thus in nature. So it is with the human personality.

With overweening confidence in his own powers, Karṇa refuses to fight while Bhīṣma is alive, and remains sulking in his tent. His stupendous vanity thus deprives Duryodhana of whatever help he could have rendered during the first ten days of the war, a circumstance which did not fail to give the Pāṇḍavas a certain initial advantage over their enemies in spite of the heavy numerical odds against them. In technical skill Karṇa was the equal of Arjuna, if not his superior ; but he lacked the spiritual strength which sustained Arjuna in the hour of trial. The virtuosity of Karṇa is foiled at a critical moment by a higher power, which taking advantage of some loophole in Karṇa's armour of invincibility, strikes him down, to help the struggling and down-trodden adherents of the cause of justice and righteousness.

Much capital has been made by modern critics of the fact that Śrī Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to kill Karṇa while the latter is engaged in releasing the wheel of his chariot, which had sunk into a hollow of the earth. Karṇa pleads for time, asking his opponent to wait until he has freed the wheel. He points out that it is unrighteous for a man to fight from a chariot against one who has no chariot; it is unbecoming behaviour in a cavalier as Arjuna called himself. How easy it is to pick faults in the behaviour of others, and how difficult to see the faults in one's own! But Providence, which rules over the destinies of men, has no such preference between one individual and another. It therefore unfailingly metes out justice with meticulous precision to all alike in appropriate ways and through devious channels. That is evidently the lesson which the epic poets want to teach.

Some writers who have been dazzled by the intrepid courage, deep loyalty and unbounded generosity of Karṇa have challenged the authenticity of the epic text, contending that the character of Karṇa as depicted in the present form of the epic is not consonant with his fate and with the criticism by the epic poets of his actions. They attribute this contradiction to an inversion of the epic theme already referred to, maintaining that in an earlier form of the epic Karṇa, the son of the sun-god, was himself the hero, a role usurped in the present epic by some other person or persons. The advice given to him by the sun-god was a test of his character, and Karṇa's refusal to act on it is sufficient evidence of the nobility of his character and his lofty idealism. This, the critic maintains, is in sharp contrast with the unchivalrous actions of the Pāṇḍavas, who abandon too easily the high ideals of knightly conduct and honour, and resort to unworthy means for bringing about the death on the battlefield of their honourable and chivalrous foes like Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Duryodhana. But such a view is quite baseless and shows little understanding of the epic and of the ideology of the epic poets. When one remembers the circumstances of Karṇa's birth and early life, one can readily account for the apparent contradictions in his character and understand his behaviour as also his fate. It is easy to recognize in his features, as explained above, the physiognomy of a man with frustration complex and therefore a clear case of abnormal mentality.

The secret which Kuntī wanted to preserve and which she thought she had skillfully buried, unknown to anybody, by severing her connection with her first child at its birth, could not be maintained for long, as no secret can. The ocean of life brings back to her, after the lapse of some time, the unwanted child which she had snatched away from her warm palpitating milkful breasts and unkindly set afloat on the insensible bosom of the cold indifferent river. In the end she had to divulge the secret to the very persons whom she wanted to screen from it and from its effects,— from those very people before whom she felt need to appear as a good, wise and virtuous woman, namely from her own children. First she had to recount the story of her youthful indiscretion to her eldest son, Karṇa, whom she had wronged. She had hoped that by telling him the great secret of her little life, she could avoid the consequences of that act recoiling on her other sons, the five Pāṇḍavas, whom she loved. In that she was destined to be disappointed, as Karṇa, in his turn, remained adamant, refusing, firmly but politely, to oblige her and make a scape-goat of himself. For her complete emancipation she had in the end to repeat the story with her own lips, after the death of Karṇa, to the surviving sons, in order that the last rites at least may be duly performed if the first had been neglected, in the pious hope that his life in the hereafter may not be a repetition of the hell in which he had lived on the earth. She had thus to acknowledge before the world her motherhood of the fatherless child after the death of Karṇa, which she had failed to do at his birth. Could anything be more silently tragic ? When she had unburdened her soul to her sons, she was at long last freed from the torturing power of that secret which acting through devious channels had helped to grind to dust the flowers of youth and chivalry of the heroic age of India. Could the epic fulfil better and in a more poignant and emphatic manner its function of catharsis for those who can follow its language and understand its deep meaning and vital message to mankind ?

Vidura is in many ways the exact counterpart of Karṇa. There are innumerable ways in which one can injure the mind of a growing child. One of them is by treating it on any other basis than that of its own individuality. Karṇa was the victim of such faulty and harsh treatment. The society which had treated him like an outcast had suffered the dire consequences of its own actions. Vidura was mercifully saved from such treatment. His birth was likewise of a somewhat shady character. Although he passed as the brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, he was as a matter of fact born of a slave girl employed in the royal household. But there was no secrecy about his parentage because his birth was quite legitimate according to the ideas prevailing in those times,—a somewhat unexpected result of a miscarried form of marriage by levirate. However, he was brought up for what he was, and treated with kindness and consideration in the house of his parents. His station in life was that of a major domo in the royal household, and he did not aspire to be anything else, performing the duties pertaining to the post with great efficiency and singular fidelity. Placed in an inferior and unenviable position from birth, he had overcome his ego, subduing it completely and sublimating it. Having resolved all the conflicts of his nature, he is represented and known in Indian antiquity as being gifted with deep insight into the mysteries of life and respected by all as a wise man. As such he advises his errant elder brother, who constantly turns to him, when in distress, for advice and consolation. Thus having been gifted with the boon of a peaceful and contented soul, his benign presence helps to tone down the conflicts and mitigate the sorrows which he cannot altogether prevent.

The blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra is a typical personality. He is neither wholly good, nor wholly evil, but he is definitely not *beyond* good and evil ; rather he is very much in the grip of that tantalizing couple which has kept humanity on the whirl from the beginning of time. His besetting sin is just that he is weak and vacillating, oscillating continuously, like a pendulum, between good and evil. He has good impulses, but they are no more than impulses and very weak ones at that. Dhṛtarāṣṭra throughout recognizes, or at least feels, that injustice is being done to the Pāṇḍavas, but he is ever prone to exonerate his own sons and explain away to himself and others their mischievous activities and wickednesses. As the clouds gather thickly over his head and he begins to be oppressed by it. It may be noted that these character-studies by our epic poets have been undertaken not primarily for the sake of poetic or artistic effect. They have been undertaken with a conscious didactic purpose and in a spirit of deadly earnest. The problem is always the same, the riddle of life ; and the entire work is informed with the spirit of the conscious quest of the ideal life. A solution to the riddle is sought, in the first instance, in the inevitable law of Karma, a mighty law, one more important to mankind than the Law of Gravitation or the Thermodynamic Law or any other law of science. This much misunderstood law is commonly taken to imply that all events are predetermined by arbitrary decree, involving unquestioning submission to and acquiescence in all that happens as inevitable. A little reflection is sufficient to show that this is an absurd proposition, being in essence nothing more than just an easy and convenient way of ridding onseself of all irksome and unpleasant responsibilities. The real meaning of the law is just the opposite and may be simply stated as follows. As an oyster makes its own shell and imprisons itself, quite unconsciously, within the shell, so the *mind* of man creates and necessitates its own life and fate. In other words, man binds himself, hand and foot, of his own free will, with self-made ties. So much most people might understand and will probably admit. But that is only a partial truth. There is an important corollary to it, which people generally ignore, but which is an essential part of it, and that is this. By the selfsame agency, within his control, by which a man binds himself, he can, if he will, cut those bonds asunder and set himself free. The mind of man, like Janus, is double-faced. It plays a double role : *mana eva manuṣyāṇām̐ kāraṇam̐ bandhamokṣayoḥ*. It is the cause of bondage when it is turned outwards, and the cause of release when it is turned inwards.

We have passed rapidly under review the epic story on the mundane plane. The central narrative, as we saw, is essentially a story of the heroic age, ringing with battle cries and enlivened with thrilling vicissitudes of war. The clash of steel and the consequent devastation in this titanic struggle for the possession of a throne find here noble expression, which is characterized by a generous breadth of treatment and exhibits a true epic sweep. But that is not the only interest, not even the main interest. Indeed, few people who have read the *Mahābhārata* know or care to remember the innumerable and amazingly complicated details of that war, when the flower of the knighthood of Bhāratavarṣa was possessed of the fury of war — *krūre me vartate matiḥ*, confesses one Brahmin warrior (B. 6.112. 5) — and " hell was enacted." When we read the poem with attention we discover that from end to end the interest is held and centred on character. The poet chronicler seems to be describing events, but he does not for an instant forget that he is engaged in elucidating the history of souls.

The vast canvass of this gigantic epopee is studded with little instructive episodes dealing with all manner of relations and situations in life, which the epic tries to study by putting them under the microscope and illuminating them from its own point of view. We find there stories throwing light on the relations between a king and his subjects, between a master and his servants, between parents and children, between husband and wife, between man and man and, above all, between Man and God. The situations depicted are equally varied and numerous. As Sister NIVEDITA has so lucidly and incisively put it, the stories embody the endeavour on the part of the epic poets " to understand every man's relation to a given situation and to see in conflicting lines of conduct that same irresistible necessity which, acting from within, hurls each one of us upon its fate." We observe this in the life and fate of Bhīṣma and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, of Duryodhana and Vidura, of Kuntī and Karṇa, of Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna.

Even so, I should say, the *Mahābhārata* would remain merely a literary composition of outstanding merit like Homer's *Iliad* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Dante's *Divina Comedia*. We should still find it difficult, I think, to explain the sustained interest which this great book has evoked among the people of India continuously for nearly two millennia. What did those successive generations of men and women in India, and even beyond the confines of India, in Greater India, seek and find in the *Mahābhārata* ? What made Sir Charles Elliot say that the *Mahābhārata* was greater than the *Iliad* ? Surely not the story of a futile war of annihilation; not merely the magic of the heaven-sent language; not merely the fleeting specimens of verbal embroidery; not just the subtle play of capricious fancy or seductive imagination; nor even, to be sure, character-study in the modern sense. There must be some more serious purpose in the work which gives the *Mahābhārata* its vitality, its universality, its immortality. What is that?

Lecture III

THE STORY ON THE ETHICAL PLANE

Some one has remarked about the *Iliad* that in that epic we have a second-rate subject made into a first-rate—and indeed an incomparable — poem by the genius of a great poet. I think this is true of the *Mahābhārata* also, — though, naturally, in a very different way.

The story of the Great Epic of India centres round the fortunes of two rival branches of a very ancient royal family whose mutual jealousy and quarrels lead to a devastating war which ends in an almost complete annihilation of that large family, along with the allies and supporters of both sides. Of the eighteen *akṣauhiṇīs* or armies which met and fought on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, on that tragic and fateful occasion, there survived — we are told — only nine souls, the five Pāṇḍavas with Śrī Kṛṣṇa on one side and on the other only three minor warriors : a terrible lesson which humanity must, it seems, learn afresh at the end of every great war.

The conflict is on the face of it a common fratricidal war of annihilation for the possession of a throne, which was probably not the first of its kind and which certainly was not the last. History has on the other hand on record magnificent instances of heroic struggles of the common people against ambitious ruthless tyrants or of weak nations against powerful foreign foes, wars which awaken our sympathy and stir us deeply. But an internecine war among kinsfolk for a share in a paltry patrimony can hardly be said to possess any redeeming feature, whatever heroism be displayed by individual combatants participating in the war. Some of the minor incidents of our story likewise do not reflect any great credit on the actors in that tragic drama. Many critics, I think, would admit with a pang that the subject of the Gambling Match, for instance, was not quite in the first rank of nobleness. Consider the fact that the heroes of the poem undergo all those trials and tribulations merely as a result of an insane game of dice at which Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest Pāṇḍava, using — or rather abusing — his absolute and autocratic powers as the ruler of a kingdom and the head of a joint family, foolishly stakes and gambles away successively his personal belongings, his kingdom, his four brothers, himself, and finally, when there is nothing in the wide world left to call his own, even his devoted wife. And why does he do all this ? Merely because — we are told — as a Kṣatriya or an honourable knight, Yudhiṣṭhira, who was an utter novice at the game, could not very well refuse to play when challenged. These facts, it must be conceded, put the emotion several degrees lower.

What gives this trivial tale of petty jeolousy, intrigue and strife between rival claimants to a small kingdom in North India real depth and significance is the projection of the story on to a cosmic background, by its own interpretation of the Bhārata War as a mere incident in the ever recurring struggle between the Devas and the Asuras ; in other words, as a mere phase in cosmic evolution.

Let us examine this point a little more fully. The Ādiparvan relates in great detail the story of the birth of all important persons participating in the drama, who are described there as being either incarnations of Devas or Asuras, or else of other than mortal parentage. The story goes that it is in response to the prayer of the outraged Earth, wasted by the tyranny of demonic kings then ruling, that Viṣṇu takes birth among the Yādavas along with other heavenly beings — gods, ṛṣis, gandharvas, kinnaraṣ and so on — with a view to relieving the burden of the Earth. Thus, according to the epic itself, the

Mahābhārata War is the expression of a state of tension between two ideal orders of beings, a moral type wherein the gods become incarnate as heroic individuals and an immoral — or rather an unmoral — type which it is the object of the former to destroy. This war — or, to give it a more general name, conflict — is an eternal recurrence, a phenomenon assuming in the space-time continuum the most diverse forms and aspects. The Mahābhārata thus becomes the type or the archetype of all wars or conflicts of the past, the present or the future.

This aspect of the *Mahābhārata* as a projection on the cosmic background deserves to be dealt with in greater detail as it is an aspect which appears not to be widely known or understood. About the cosmic character or Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the epic itself is *not* in any doubt. He is an Īśvara. He is the Puruṣa of the Sāmkhyas ; the Brahman, the Ātman or the Paramātman of the Vedantins. The man of knowledge affirms that Vāsudeva is All (*Vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti, Gītā* 7. 19). Clearly he cannot be more. I may add, there is to my knowledge not a single passage in the *Mahābhārata* which does not presuppose the divinity or the cosmic character of Śrī Kṛṣṇa ; or, to put it more precisely, which does not assume that he is an *Avatāra* or incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, in the peculiar sense in which the word "Avatāra" is used in Indian philosophy or metaphysics.

The five Pāṇḍavas are treated equally clearly as incarnations of gods on a lower plane : Yudhiṣṭhira of Dharma, Bhīma of Vāyu, Arjuna of Indra, and the Twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, of the Aśvins.

As for Yudhiṣṭhira, his standing epithet is Dharmarāja, the king who was Dharma incarnate. He is uniformly described as the son of Dharma (Dharmasuta or Dharmasūnu), a portion, that is, part-incarnation, of Dharma (Dharmasyāṁśaḥ). His whole life is cast in the mould of Dharma (3. 32. 4) :

dharma eva manaḥ Kṛṣṇe svabhāvāc caiva me dhṛtaṃ /

Of the five brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira alone is able to answer the questions of Dharma, who confronts him in the shape of a

Yakṣa. By doing that he secures the restoration to life of his brothers who, while searching for the fire-sticks belonging to a Brahmin, and getting thirsty, had drunk the waters of an enchanted lake and died instantly. Again, when the Pāṇḍavas, after renouncing the world, make their last great journey, Yudhiṣṭhira refuses to enter heaven without his faithful dog, which had followed him all the way from the capital and which reveals itself in the end again to have been the god Dharma in disguise. There can, therefore, be no doubt that the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira is conceived as standing in special relation to Dharma, as being in fact the embodiment of Dharma. And this conception is consistently carried through by the epic poets.

The intimate connection between Bhīma and Vāyu is equally manifest. It is seen for one thing very markedly in his superhuman strength, his wild impetuosity, and sweeping gusts of violent temper. When his brothers and mother seek to escape from Vāraṇāvata, which was intended by the malignant Duryodhana to be their furneral pyre, they succeed in making their escape owing to the efforts of Bhīma, who carries all five of them on his back. When his mace was not at hand, a favourite trick of his was to uproot large trees, quickly tear off their leaves, and make out of them gigantic bludgeons with which he belaboured his opponents till they became senseless. Both these are feats worthy of the son of the wind-god.

As for Arjuna, who is frequently styled Aindri, Indrasuta or Indrasūnu, it is effectively borne in upon the reader that he is a special favourite of Indra. He is the only one among the Pāṇḍava brothers who visits and resides in the world of Indra (Indraloka), where he is accorded a specially warm welcome. Indra shows his favour by letting him share his throne and imparting to him the secret knowledge of divine weapons. On a subsequent occasion the king of the gods, in the guise of a humble Brahmin, begs from Karṇa,— Arjuna's foremost adversary,— his armour and ear-rings, which had made Karṇa invincible.

The Twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, do not play any important or independent role in the epic drama, but they inherit the beauty, comeliness and kindly disposition of the Aśvins. And when the twins seek service during the twelve months' incognito at the court of Virāṭa, Nakula, the elder of the twins, becomes the superintendent of horses and the younger one becomes the superintendent of cattle.

The Kauravas were likewise incarnations of Asuras or Antigods. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kaurava brothers, was Kali himself (Kalipūruṣaḥ), the arch-fiend, evil incarnate. The inseparable associate of Kali is Dvāpara, who was born as Śakuni, the arch-gambler, the intimate adviser and helpmate of Duryodhana in evil designs.

A very clear proof of the fact that the Kauravas were viewed by the epic poets as incarnations of the Asuras will be found in adhyaya 240 of the Āraṇyakaparvan, where it is narrated that Duryodhana and his companions go to the Dvaitavana Forest with a view to displaying their magnificence and putting the Pāṇḍavas to shame. On the way they are taken prisoners by the Gandharvas, who happened to be sporting there ; and they are rescued by the efforts of the Pāṇḍavas themselves. Duryodhana, in his chagrin, vows to starve himself to death, but is dissuaded by the Daityas and the Dānavas, who plead that if he dies, their cause is lost (3.240.23 *cd*) :

vinaṣṭe tvayi cāsmākaṁ pakṣo hīyeta Kaurava /

Duryodhana is their only refuge as the Pāṇḍavas are of the gods (3.240.24 *cd*).

tvam asmākam gatir nityaṁ devatānāṁ ca Pāṇḍavāḥ /

They point out to Duryodhana that Daityas and Rākṣasas have been born among the Kṣatriyas who would fight Duryodhana's enemies, and the Dānavas have been born on earth to help Duryodhana (3.240) :

daityarakṣogaṇāś caiva saṁbhūtāḥ kṣatrayoniṣu /
yotsyanti yudhi vikramya śatrubhis tava pārthiva // 17 *abcd*
sahāyārthaṁ ca te vīrāḥ saṁbhūtā bhuvi dānavāḥ / 10 *cd*

A whole chapter of the Ādiparvan, the Book of Genesis, is devoted to the development of this idea. The good and evil prototypes of almost all the chief actors of the drama, among the Devas and the Asuras, are individually listed as in a formal cast of any modern drama.

The blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra was an incarnation of Haṁsa, a son of Ariṣṭa. The word *ariṣṭa* means, among other things, evil, ill luck, calamity or a portentous phenomenon foreboding misfortune. The progeny of Ariṣṭa must therefore be the harbinger of calamity, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana proved to be. The brothers of Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana and others, were the Pulastya demons (1.61.82). Pulastya was the father of Viśravas and grandfather of Rāvaṇa ; and all the Rākṣasas are said to have sprung from him. So much for the Kuru family.

But our list comprises not merely the major characters just mentioned, but even such very minor characters as Dhṛṣṭaketu, Druma, Bhagadatta, Ketumān, Śālva, Bṛhadratha, Nagnajit, Prativindhya, and a host of others too numerous to mention. The details do not matter to us. I am citing these facts merely to show you how seriously the epic poets took the aspect of the story as an incident, or rather as an act, of the cosmic drama.

It should not be imagined that the account of the cosmic character of the *Mahābhārata* is in any sense an "interpolation". It may have been an afterthought ; but even this afterthought is sufficiently early and deeply ingrained in the texture of the epic in the form in which we have received it ; and that is all that matters to us here.

Speculation is rife regarding the antecedants of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Was Śrī Kṛṣṇa originally god or man ? BARTH held that Kṛṣṇa was probably at first the *kuladevatā*, the ethnic god, of some powerful confederation of Rajput clans, — a character, as he puts it, "of complex quality, mingling myths of fire, lightning, storm, heaven and sun". HOPKINS partly agreed with BARTH. He writes learnedly of the "Gangetic Kṛiṣṇa" as the "patron god of the Pandavas", who "sinks from god to man, not vice versa — the tribal hero as sun-god became recognized by the priests as one with Viṣṇu". It is not very clear to me what HOPKINS exactly means, but I hope it is to you. KEITH, who may stand as a representative of those who see in the original Kṛṣṇa a deity of vegetation, rejects the solar theory on the ground that it is a little difficult to ascribe to Kṛṣṇa an original solar character, as his name tells seriously against such an identification. "The 'dark sun'," as KEITH pertinently observes, "requires more explanation than it seems likely to receive."

With regard to these airy speculations of Western savants, it may be observed that there is absolutely no direct and positive evidence to support the theories that originally Kṛṣṇa was some kind of god, who was subsequently transformed by the epic poets into a man, — a claim which may, therefore, be unhesitatingly rejected as not proved. We come back, therefore, more convinced than ever, to the old position that Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who plays so important a part in the epic drama, was in very truth a Kṣatriya chieftain who participated in the Bhārata War. His father's name was Vasudeva and his mother's Devakī, after whom he was known as Devakī-nandana. He had an elder brother Balarāma or Saṁkarṣaṇa, and he sprang from the ancient Vṛṣṇi or Sātvata branch of the family of the Yādavas. Their original home was in Mathurā, a city with which history and tradition alike connect Śrī Kṛṣṇa's name. There is, moreover, reason to believe that he is identical with Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī (Devakīputra), who is mentioned in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.17.6) as a pupil of Ghora Āṅgirasa and who was initiated by his guru in some secret doctrine. We must, therefore, be content with taking Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be a person of the same order of reality as the other heroes of the epic, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. There is no cogent reason to separate Śrī Kṛṣṇa from the other chief actors in this drama. Nay, it seems impossible to separate him from them. And just as the latter are uniformly treated as incarnations of the minor gods and the anti-gods of the Indian pantheon, so Śrī Kṛṣṇa is also consistently treated as the incarnation of the Supreme Being. As I said, there is no passage in the epic which does not presuppose, or which contradicts, his character as an incarnation of the Supreme Being, who is generally called in our epic Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa.

This projection on to a cosmic background raises our epic story at once to a much higher level of thought, giving it for one thing, linguistic and ideological continuity with the Vedic antiquity. It stamps the epic at the same time as the artistic expression of a primordial experience, which, as C. J. JUNG puts it, "derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind — that suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages or evokes a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness". That is however no reason for condemning these inspirations of ancient seers as worthless lucubrations of an infantile, pre-logical age. For, as the same great psychologist points out, "these primordial experiences, though they surpass man's understanding, rend the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world, and allow a glimpse into the unfathomed abyss of what has not yet become."

We shall return to the deeper significance of the cosmic projection in the sequel. Let us meanwhile examine closer the points of contact between the Vedic and the epic ideology. The Vedas, as is well known, are full of allusions to the conflict between the Devas and the Asuras, but the *Yajurveda* and its Brāhmaṇas are particularly rich in such references. One of them is the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1.1.10), which says that Prajāpati created *Virāj* and that the gods and the demons quarrelled over its possession :

Prajāpatiḥ prajā asṛjata / sa riricāno 'manyata /
sa tapo 'tapyata / sa ātmānam vīryam apaśyat /
tad asmāt sahasordhvam asṛjyata / sa virāḍ abhavat /
taṁ devāsurā vyagṛhṇata /

Virāj or *Virāṭ* is sometimes regarded as a male power ; but in the *Atharva Veda* (8.10.28; 11.8.30) *Virāj* is spoken of as a female (as in the present passage) and regarded as a cow. The sex of the first creations is of no consequence in mythology. In fact they must be androgynous, as necessitated by the primitive conditions of ambivalence. Here *Virāj* is taken as a female and must be assumed to be a cow. For the Brāhmaṇa passage goes on to say that Prajāpati cautioned the Devas and the Asuras, saying :

mama vā eṣā / doha eva yuṣmākam iti /

"She is mine forsooth. Yours shall be only the milk." This *Virāj*, I need not point out, is the prototype of the mythical cow of Vasiṣṭha, which satisfies all desires, the cow of plenty (*Kāmadhenu* or *Kāmaduh*). It is in other words material prosperity. In course of time the conflicts between the Devas and the Asuras became more frequent and more sanguinary. And the Brahmanic idea is that the Devas used ritualistic performances and the mystic forces liberated by such performances to overcome the Asuras.

Now, since the Vedic times there had been a silent transition in thought from the many gods to whom the most elaborate forms of sacrifices were ordained in the Vedas to the One Absolute of the Upaniṣads. In the course of this deposition of the gods to subordinate intelligences, all the rituals and sacrifices had become, by a mere process of exegesis, symbols and texts for the deepest Vedantic speculation. Parallel to this development there was the change in the aims and the character of the traditional war between the Devas and the Asuras. Whereas the Vedic conflict between the warring parties was merely for the sake of *aiśvarya*, lordship of the worlds, a phase of power-politics, the Mahābhārata War, fought between later incarnations of these very Devas and Asuras, is motivated in a very different manner. This war was for the sake of Dharma, moral law, an abstract principle difficult even to define precisely; it is so subtle. The Kurukṣetra was above all a dharmakṣetra (dharmakṣetre Kurukṣetre. *Gītā* 1. 1). The forces are the same, but they are now ranged on the sides of Dharma and Adharma. The Pāṇḍava hero, Yudhiṣṭhira, though "firm in battle", is a Dharmarāja. He is the son of Dharma ; therefore, according to Indian conceptions, Dharma incarnate. Duryodhana, on the other side, the eldest Kaurava, was the incarnation of Adharma. He was, as remarked already, Kali himself (Kalipūruṣaḥ). Yudhiṣṭhira engages in the war with the Kauravas because in the position to which he has been reduced by his own folly his dharma suffers diminution, it being impossible for him to fulfil his dharma as a Kṣatriya. That is just the point made out by Bhīma in the course of his long peroration intended to rouse Yudhiṣṭhira to action (3.34.125*).

svadharmaṁ pratipadyasva jahi śatrūn samāgatān /

"Perform your dharma, the duty pertaining to your own Varṇa or order and destroy your enemies."

The relative attitude to life of these two antagonistic parties or sodalities is illustrated by a striking episode recounted in the Udyogaparvan. Duryodhana and Arjuna alike desired to secure the sympathy and aid of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Setting out for Dvārakā, both arrived there on the same day and going to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's house found him sleeping peacefully. Duryodhana, who arrived there first, thereupon pompously took a sumptuous seat placed near the head of the bed of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, while Arjuna, bowing humbly to the sleeper, stood patiently with joined hands at the foot of the bed. That in itself, it will be noticed, is an extraordinarily significant symbolic tableau, a static representation of the entire incident, a masterpiece of behaviouristic study. And so they wait. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa awoke, his eyes fell first on Arjuna. And how should they not? The friendship between Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa was such that the eyes of the sleeper were involuntarily drawn to him whom he loved most. Śrī Kṛṣṇa asked them eagerly the reason of this unexpected visit and was told that they had both come to claim his support in the impending war. Such was the calmness of his outlook on life that Śrī Kṛṣṇa readily admitted the claims of both and expressed his intention of helping both sides equally, but in different ways. To one he was going to give his mighty army; the other he would serve in person but — unarmed, he says, leaving the choice to themselves. Arjuna, being the younger of the two was given the first choice, and he chose promptly Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whom he loved above all things on earth; while Duryodhana accepted equally joyfully the powerful army of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which fell to his share. They chose precisely as Śrī Kṛṣṇa had expected and intended. Clearly Duryodhana did not want Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whom he did not love in the least. He merely wanted large hosts to help him in keeping hold of his ill-gotten possessions. Arjuna on the other hand did not want large hosts so much as he wanted the love and esteem of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who, he was confident, would bring him not only victory but also fame and glory. He disdained the help of the army, divorced from the adorable Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The epic poets have quite intentionally placed at the disposal of Yudhiṣṭhira all the physical power that he could wish for to help him in the impending struggle to regain his lost kingdom. His brother Bhīmasena is a veritable giant, with the strength of ten thousand elephants (*nāgāyutaprāṇa*). The ponderous mace of Bhīma is a terror to his enemies. In personal combat he had killed at different times four notorious giants of those days : Baka, Hiḍimba, Kirmīra and Jaṭāsura. He had killed in personal combat not only Kīcaka, the lascivious general of the king of Virāṭa, but also the terrible Jarāsandha, who was then preparing to sacrifice to god Śiva one hundred kings whom he had vanquished in battles, captured alive and kept for that purpose close prisoners in a well-guarded dungeon. Yudhiṣṭhira's other brother, Arjuna, is proficient in the use of all the subtle weapons of offence and defence then in use. He has not only been carefully trained from his boyhood by Ācārya Droṇa, but he had so completely mastered the entire science of arms that his preceptor regarded him as his equal and loved him as dearly as he loved his own son. Yudhiṣṭhira's four brothers had between them conquered the whole world and helped Yudhiṣṭhira to celebrate the Rājasūya sacrifice, establishing his right to universal sovereignty. Yudhiṣṭhira had, moreover, powerful allies in Drupada and Virāṭa, who were two puissant kings closely related to him by ties of marriage. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whom Yudhiṣṭhira recognizes as an *Avatāra* of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, had admitted the justice of his cause and was anxious to help him to regain his kingdom. What more could Yudhiṣṭhira desire? Śrī Kṛṣṇa alone could not only destroy the entire Kaurava army but had the power to annihilate with his Sudarśana the whole world, if he so willed.

The Dharmarāja does not however depend upon mere physical strength to give him victory over his enemies, because his is a just cause. And a just cause must succeed in the end. As EMERSON has so pregnantly put it : "There is no defeat except from within. There is really no insurmountable barrier save your inherent weakness of purpose." And this "inherent weakness of purpose" is invariably rooted in Adharma, in unrighteousness. But the inconsolable Draupadī and the impatient Bhīma do not see that. They want to retaliate at once, paying back the enemy in the same coin. Employing in turn persuasive eloquence, sophistical reasoning, biting sarcasm, and even ridicule, they try to rouse Yudhiṣṭhira and induce him to break what they consider an unfair and unholy compact, and to strike at the enemy immediately, before the latter has had time to secure allies and consolidate his position, — which is very sound commonsense.

The argument which develops at this family discussion is illuminating for the standpoint of the epic and its method of instruction in ethical matters. Śrī Kṛṣṇa had tried to console the heavy-hearted Draupadī and promised her that she should again reign as queen as she used to and that the wives of her enemies would weep as she was then weeping. "The heavens might fall," Śrī Kṛṣṇa had sworn, "the Himavat might split, the earth might be rent, or the waters of the ocean might dry up, but my words shall never be in vain, O Kṛṣṇā !" (3.13.117)

pated dyaur himavān śīryet pṛthivī śakalībhavet /
śuṣyet toyanidhiḥ Kṛṣṇe na me moghaṁ vaco bhavet / /

Yet Draupadī would not be consoled, and we find her soon urging Yudhiṣṭhira to action, beseeching him tearfully not to forget and forgive the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the evil-minded Kauravas. This hysterical outburst of his queen drew from the exiled monarch an admirable discourse on forgiveness : "If the man who hath ill speeches from another returneth those speeches afterwards ; if the injured man returneth his injuries ; if the chastised person chastiseth in return ; if the fathers slay sons and sons fathers ; if husbands slay wives and wives husbands ; then, O Kṛṣṇā, how can birth take place in a world where anger thus prevails ?[1]" But Draupadī still answered angrily ; and, assailing the order of the world, she bitterly declared that God played with his creatures according to his pleasure, as a child makes or destroys capriciously its toys. What was the use of virtue, asks Draupadī, if the virtuous are plunged in suffering, while the wicked were prosperous ? Is not that our difficulty also, and the difficulty of every man with good and pious intentions since the beginning

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1. 3.30.27-29^a

of time? Gently but resolutely, Yudhiṣṭhira answered this feminine apostle of violence, praising the well-chosen phrases and the eloquence of the lovely-browed Pāñcāla princess: "Thou speakest, however, the language of atheism, O princess. I never act solicitous of the fruits of my action. I give away, because it is my duty to give. I sacrifice, because it is my duty to sacrifice. I act virtuously not from the desire of reaping the fruits of virtue, but from my desire not to transgress the ordinances of the scriptures, and beholding also the conduct of the good and the wise. My heart, O Kṛṣṇā, is naturally attracted towards virtue. The man who wishes to reap the fruits of virtue is a trader in virtue (dharmavāṇijyaka)."[1] Nevertheless, it was true that acts did bear fruits, good or bad; and that in the long run, under providence of God, the practice of virtue was naturally and ultimately the source of prosperity and happinesss. But the details of providence would be understood only by the wise, by those in whose minds dwelt quiet and peace and holiness. "Therefore," continues Yudhiṣṭhira, "though thou mayst not see the fruits of virtue, thou shouldst not yet doubt religion or the gods. Thou must perform sacrifices with a will, and practise charity without arrogance. Acts in this world do have their fruits, and virtue alone is eternal. Let thy doubts, therefore, O Kṛṣṇā, be dispelled like mist. Reflecting upon all this, let thy scepticism give way to faith. Slander not God, who is the lord of all creatures. Learn to know Him. Bow down to Him. Let not thy mind be such. And, O Kṛṣṇā, never disregard that Supreme Being, through whose grace mortal man by piety acquires immortality[2]."

Draupadī still pleaded passionately that it was her husband's duty to regain his kingdom of which he had been robbed by a gang of unprincipled ruffians; and Bhīma angrily chimed in, reproaching Yudhiṣṭhira for their forlorn condition. "Virtue was not enough," argues Bhīma, "kings must show strength and fight. Let us set forth now and do battle and wrest the sovereignty from Duryodhana." In reply Yudhiṣṭhira patiently admits his own fault. He had lost self-control while playing that fateful game of dice, which had brought them to ruin. But he had given his word to abide by the throw of the dice as to exile, and he would not break it now. Bhīma should have objected then, if at all, Yudhiṣṭhira pertinently points out. Having given the pledge, he would not violate it. "My solemn promise can never be untrue. I regard dharma to be superior to life itself and even to a blessed state of celestial existence. Kingdoms, sons, fame, wealth — all these do not come up even to one sixteenth part of truth."

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[1] 3.32. 1^{d}—4, and 111*.
[2] 3.32.36-40.

These few chapters of the Āraṇyakaparvan — or to call it by its name now in common use, the Vanaparvan — contain in the form of an animated controversy the substance of the entire ethical teaching of the epic. Worthy of our special attention is the discourse of Yudhiṣṭhira himself, which represents, as is natural, the "settled doctrine" (siddhānta) of the epic as opposed to the prima facie arguments (pūrvapakṣa) put forward by Draupadī and Bhīma.

In this discourse there is a distinct recognition of God as the dispenser of rewards and punishments, — of a moral governance of the world, and at the end of it reference is made to the inscrutable character of divine dispensations; reverence towards the deity is enjoined, and an intimation is made that it is those who are devoted to him who enjoy his favour and attain immortality. But while the speaker maintains that it is a culpable and even unpardonable sin to entertain any doubt as to the ultimate consequences of righteousness, he expresses a stoical indifference to the attainment of any recompense in his own case, and a lofty scorn of the notion of trafficking in goodness as an instrument for procuring pleasure or happiness, — asserting even that those who seek to extract from virtue all the advantages which it can yield will gain nothing, — and rises to the elevated position of loving moral excellence for its own sake, as a good in itself and as its own reward. I need not point out that this is an elaborate — I might say, an illustrated — commentary on the doctrine of the abandonment of the fruit of action, which in the *Gītā* is said to be greater than meditation, greater than knowledge, greater than constant practice, for it leads in the end to tranquility (*Gītā* 12.12):

śreyo hi jñānam abhyāsāj jñānād dhyānaṁ viśiṣyate /
dhyānāt karmaphalatyāgas tyāgāc chāntir anantaram //

Let us, however, return to our story. A few years after the incident narrated above, Arjuna returns from Indra's heaven, having acquired various celestial weapons, including the Pāśupata, a most deadly weapon capable of destroying the whole world, which was obtained by him by propitiating god Śiva. Even this was no inducement to Yudhiṣṭhira to break his vow, to shorten perforce the period of the exile and win back his lost kingdom. Yudhiṣṭhira would never sacrifice Dharma, even if he could get thereby the kingdom of the whole earth (B.2.67.48):

tajeta sarvāṁ Pṛthivīṁ samṛddhām
Yudhiṣṭhiro dharmam atho na jahyāt /

Arjuna is likewise shown to be steadfast in the practice of Dharma, as is exemplified by an incident that occurred earlier during the exile of the Pāṇḍavas. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa came to visit the exiled Pāṇḍavas and was told the sorry tale of the dice play and its sequel, he became furiously angry and threatened to soak the earth with the blood of Duryodhana and his three close associates, Karṇa, Śakuni and Duḥśāsana (3.13.5) :

Duryodhanasya Karṇasya Śakuneś ca durātmanaḥ /
Duḥśāsanacaturthānām bhūmiḥ pāsyati śoṇitam / /

Having done that he proposed next to crown Yudhiṣṭhira king (3.13, 6ª) :

tataḥ sarve 'bhiṣiñcāmo Dharmarājaṁ Yudhiṣṭhiram /

The Avatāra is *ex hypothesi* omnipotent and his will is irresistible; and Śrī Kṛṣṇa was recognized as such by Pāṇḍavas. Even Draupadī, who was the most hardheaded of the lot, honours him as a cosmic incarnation :

Viṣṇus tvam asi durdharṣa tvaṁ yajño Madhusūdana /
yaṣṭā tvam asi yaṣṭavyo jāmadagnyo yathābravīt/
divaṁ te sirasā vyāptaṁ padbhyāṁ ca pṛthivī vibho /
jaṭharam ta ima lokāḥ puruṣo 'si sanātanaḥ /
sa te 'ham duḥkham ākhyāse praṇayān Madhusūdana /
īśas tvaṁ sarvabhūtānāṁ ye divyā ye ca mānuṣāḥ /

There can, therefore, be no doubt that whatever we think of him — and we must keep our sentiments and judgements quite aloof—Śrī Kṛṣṇa was regarded by the Pāṇḍavas as God incarnate, who was fully capable of doing any thing at will. But that also was no temptation to Yudhiṣṭhira to invoke divine aid for undoing the mischief that had been done through his own folly, to break the solemn agreement entered into with the Kauravas, in other words, to transgress ethical bonds. On this occasion, Arjuna, Śrī Kṛṣṇa's bosom friend, his alter ego, pacifies Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Seeing his friend angry, Arjuna began to relate the terrible austerities Śrī Kṛṣṇa had practised and the feats of heroism he had performed, in previous births. Then the Eternal One of infinite energy, the Lord of the Prajāpatis, the unchallenged Ruler of the worlds, recollecting his entire life, extending through many millennia, was pacified, and he regained his accustomed composure. Nothing can be achieved before its time. The law of least interval prevails throughout the universe. In other words, Nature goes about her business in the quickest possible way, and time cannot be shortened by human endeavours, least of all by human impatience. He is a wise man who attempts no short cuts.

A similar situation arises during the course of the Bhārata War, which is even more significant. On the ninth day of the war, after much fighting of a desperate character on both sides, Bhīṣma, egged on by Duryodhana, routs the Pāṇḍava army and demoralizes the Pāṇḍavas. A deadly combat is imminent between Arjuna and Bhīṣma, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa feels that Arjuna is sparing the Grandsire and fighting shy of facing him. Like the consummate artist that he is, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, beguiled, fascinated — if only for a brief instant — by his own Māyā, indulges in a gesture, threatening to slay Bhīṣma by his divine powers. Bhīṣma, imagining that the moment of his deliverance had arrived sooner than he expected, was transported with delight. What better fate could he wish for "Come, come, O lotus-eyed god of gods," exclaimed Bhīṣma, "my homage to thee! Strike me down today in this great battle, O most noble of the Sātvata clan" (B. 6. 106. 64 f) :

ehy ehi puṇḍarīkākṣa devadeva namo 'stu te /
mām adya Sātvataśreṣṭha pātayasva mahāhave /

But it was not to be so. Arjuna, thoroughly alarmed by this unaccustomed gesture of impatience on the part of the Bhagavān, ran after him and seizing his feet begged him to return. He reminded Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the vow taken by him not to hold a weapon in his hands during the course of the war of the Bhāratas. A promise solemnly given must be kept at all costs. The use of force is of course indispensable, but force alone cannot bring victory, final victory. Things must take their own course. The Dharmarāja does not desire happiness of wealth at the price of unrighteousness (B. 2. 59. 13) :

nikṛtyā kāmaye nāhaṁ sukhāny uta dhanāni ca /

That was no time for discussion. Therefore without uttering a word Śrī Kṛṣṇa, still seeming angry, remounted the chariot and took up the reins. Dharma, the inviolable moral law, was maintained intact, notwithstanding the great provocation and the temptation to fling to the winds truth, honour, and justice.

Yudhiṣṭhira's life is a categorical insistence on the paramountcy of moral rectitude and a fixed belief in the conservation of values. The Yudhiṣṭhira-ideal is thrown into sharp relief by the epic poets with the help of the constrasted character of his antagonist, Duryodhana. Envy, jealousy and covetousness, maliciousness, duplicity and hate are the elements of his character. Wild demonic passion glows in Duryodhana, which never allows him any peace. At heart sharp as a razor, in speech he was sweet as ambrosia, and feigned the affection of a protector and friend.

sa vācāmṛtakalpaś ca bhartṛvac ca suhṛd yathā /
(B. 1.128.46)

The epic poets show us Dharma and Adharma in action, as it were, in the lives of the cousins. After the Pāṇḍavas come to Hāstinapura, all goes well for a time. Seeds of discord are sown by the thoughtless and boisterous Bhīma. He would knock his cousins down, seize them by the hair or their heels and drag them gleefully along the ground. Or he would hold a dozen of them at a time under water till they were nearly suffocated. On another occasion he would shake the tree on which some of his playmates had climbed to pluck the fruits in the orchard and down would come the fruits and the fruit-gatherers at the same time. One is apt to imagine that in this way the burly and blustering Pāṇḍava was responsible for the discord which was beginning to raise its head. The poet seems to expect this verdict, and therefore adds that he was acting " in childishness and not with malice intent " (*bālyān na drohacetasā*).

Duryodhana behaves in a markedly different way. The demonic jealousy gets the upper hand in him, and jealousy is the breeding ground of almost all other passions. But he keeps the demon in him well concealed. Duryodhana first plots to get rid of Bhīma in a surreptitious way. He causes a pavilion to be built on the banks of the Ganges, and invites the Pāṇḍavas to a picnic. There he feeds Bhīma with poisoned sweets and watches calmly the result. Contrary to his expectations, Bhīma does not die. He is only stupefied by the effect of the virulent poison. Seeing him in that state, the agents of Duryodhana bind the unconscious Bhīma hand and foot and throw him into the torrent. Bhīma sinks down like a lump of lead till he reaches the kingdom of the Nāgas, who rescue him and eventually help him to return home, but not before they had made him drink some nectar, which made him yet stronger. Foiled in this attempt, Duryodhana next makes the desparate attempt to burn the Pāṇḍavas alive by sending them to a distant village of their kingdom where a house of lac had been prepared for them. It is set on fire in the dead of night by Duryodhana's accomplices, but the Pāṇḍavas make good their escape by a subterranean passage which they had taken care to dig at the instance of Vidura. The Pāṇḍavas thereafter live independently, carving out a kingdom for themselves, which again rouses the jealousy of the Kauravas. With the help of the sinister Śakuni, Duryodhana now plots to cheat Yudhiṣṭhira of his wealth in a game of dice, and succeeds at last in sending Yudiṣṭhira and his brothers along with Draupadī into exile.

The conflict between Dharma and Adharma is the everlasting conflict between the powers of Light and Darkness, between Right and Wrong. Though evil is allowed to flourish, even to dominate, for a time, the epic wants to point out, its reign is short, because it carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. With our limited intelligence, we must fail to comprehend the wisdom of allowing Untruth, Injustice, Evil to flourish at all, but we are assured that Goodness always shall triumph in the end (yato dharmas tato jayaḥ). For, whensoever Dharma declines and Adharma uprises, the Bhagavān creates himself to guard the good and to destroy the wicked; to establish the Dharma firmly, he comes into being again and again (*Gītā* 4. 7-8).

> *Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati Bhārata /*
> *abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmy aham //*
> *paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām /*
> *dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya saṁbhavāmi yuge yuge //*

There must be very few people indeed in this workaday world who attach no value to Victory. Indeed, the vast majority of people is struggling frantically and doing the utmost in their power to achieve victory,—victory of their own people, of their own side, of their own plans, projects, ideas or interests. If now victory in final analysis is on the side of Dharma, it becomes of capital interest and importance to know what Dharma is. What is Dharma?

Various attempts have been made to bring the Indian conception of Dharma within the four corners of a logical definition. Some Mīmāṁsā writers have defined Dharma as "any matter enjoined by the Veda with a view to attaining any useful purpose (vedena prayojanam uddiśya vidhīyamāno 'rtho dharmaḥ, *Mīmāṁsānyāyaprakāśa* 3), such as for instance sacrifices and the like. The word is used sometimes to denote something which has its origin in orthodox traditional custom (ācāraprabhavo dharmaḥ). *Manusmṛti* in fact lays down at one place that ācāra is the highest Dharma (ācāraḥ paramo dharmaḥ 1. 108). At another place, the same code has given a more elaborate definition, which widens the scope of Dharma (*Manu* 2. 12):

> *vedaḥ smṛtiḥ sadācāraḥ svasya ca priyam ātmanaḥ /*
> *etac caturvidhaṁ prāhuḥ sākśād dharmasya lakṣaṇam //*

"The Veda, the sacred tradition, the customs of virtuous men, and one's own pleasure, they declare to be visibly the fourfold means of defining Dharma."

If we analyse all the various ideas which have accumulated in the course of centuries round the word Dharma, we shall find at the very bottom a " belief in the conservation of moral values", which has been proposed by Harold HOEFFLING as the definition of religion. Dharma in other words presupposes an eternal moral order which is based on cosmic archetypal ideation, which persists immutably and which is utterly independent of and indifferent to merely human preferences, conveniences or manipulations.

Though this may serve as a theoretic formulation of the concept, the question demands more comprehensive analysis and exposition for illuminating its various phases and aspects. Gualtherus H. MEES, who has analysed the conception in his book, *Dharma and Society* (p. 8) has shown that Dharma signifies any or all of the following concepts : Vedic Ṛta ; that which is normally proper, the ethical duty, virtue ; the ideal ; God and Absolute Truth ; a universal law or principle ; divine justice ; convention or a code of customs and traditions ; common law or law in general ; etc., etc. And accordingly MM. P. V. Kane, in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* has defined Dharma as "a mode of life or a code of conduct, which regulated a man's work and activities as a member of society and as an individual to bring about the gradual development of a man and to enable him to reach what was deemed to be the goal of human existence."

But the most comprehensive definition of Dharma, to my knowledge, has been given by Dr. Bhagavan DAS, the philosopher-sociologist of Benares, who has analyzed this very characteristic Indian concept as follows : " That which holds a thing together, makes it what it is, prevents it from breaking up and changing into something else, its characteristic function, its peculiar property, its fundamental attribute, its essential nature, — is its dharma, the law of its being primarily. That which makes the world-process what it is and holds all its parts together as One Whole, in a breakless all-binding chain of causes-and-effects, is the Law (or totality of laws) of Nature or Nature's God, dharma in the largest sense, the world order .... That scheme or code of laws which bind together human beings in the bonds of mutual rights-and-duties, of causes-and-consequences of actions arising out of their temperamental characters, in relation to each other and thus maintains society, is human law, mānava-dharma. Yet again, the code of life based on Veda (all-science of the laws of nature in all her departments), the due observance of which leads to happiness here and hereafter is Dharma. Briefly Dharma is characteristic property, scientifically; duty, morally and legally; religion with all its proper implications, psychologically and spiritually; and righteousness and law generally; but Duty above all" — *The Science of Social Organization*, 2nd edition, Vol. 1, pp. 49-50.

Now I am not going to make the attempt to give you another perfect definition of Dharma, a task which, as you see, has taxed better brains than mine. In reply to a question by Yudhiṣṭhira, Pitāmaha Bhīṣma, after explaining the difficulties in the way of defining it, gave some rules by which Dharma may partly be known, which I have found to be the simplest and at the same time the most profound exposition of the subject, if understood rightly. Dharma, says Bhīṣma, was ordained for the advancement and growth of all creatures; therefore that which leads to advancement and growth is Dharma. Dharma was ordained for restricting creatures from injuring one another; therefore that which prevents injury to creatures in Dahrma. Dharma is so called because it upholds all creatures; therefore that is Dharma which is capable of upholding all creatures.

Now, I have no ambition to improve upon these definitions. For, from the definitions of Dharma already given, you will have realized that a person who does not know from other sources what Dharma and Adharma are, is not likely to be any the wiser for these definitions. Admirable as all these definitions are, each in its own way, they will hardly help any person—even the wisest amongst us—to decide in a given case what is Dharma and what is Adharma. In fact, these definitions are scarcely likely to satisfy any one except a philosopher or a moralist interested in building up or propping up some particular system of philosophy or ethics.

For, when we say that victory is on the side of Dharma, we mean Dharma in a very concrete sense, answering in every case the question what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, in the innumerable situations which arise apparently of themselves and confront every person spontaneously in his individual life. Thus when we come to grips with the subject, we realize that Dharma is not simple and unitary, but manifold and complex. There are thus, for instance, rājadharma and prajādharma, jñātidharma and kuladharma, varṇāśramadharma, dānadharma, āpaddharma and mokṣadharma, strīdharma and so on and so forth. They must all be known accurately, if one is to act rightly, that is, according to the dictates of Dharma in all the various situations in life, smooth and rough, pleasant and unpleasant, normal and abnormal.

What I mean is this. The definitions given above will hardly enable an ordinarily gifted person to answer, for instance, such questions of Dharma as the following. Could Bhīṣma obtain salvation when he had renounced marriage and consequently lived and died childless? Would Yudhiṣṭhira have been justified in denouncing the pact with the Kauravas and falling upon them unawares in order to regain his kingdom, knowing as he did full well that he had been the guileless victim of a deliberate plot to rob him of his riches? Were Bhīṣma and Droṇa justified in aiding the unrighteous Kauravas and fighting for them, against their better judgement, against the dictates of their conscience? Did Arjuna behave justly in killing Bhīṣma and Droṇa, one an elderly kinsman and a righteous soul, the other his own preceptor, both having undoubted claims on his homage, his respect, and even his love? Was Draupadī truly lost when she was staked by Yudhiṣṭhira in that fateful game of dice, and did she really become the slave of the Kauravas, as they claimed?

To be able to give an authoritative and convincing answer to questions like those propounded above, one must be fully informed on such topics as these: the constitution of the several classes (varṇas) and stages (āśramas) forming ancient Indian society, their privileges, obligations and responsibilities; the theory and the practice of the marital rite (vivāha) and all matters connected therewith; the duties of the householder (gṛhastha), rites to be performed for the deceased (śrāddha) ; the rights and duties of a woman (strīdharma); results of evil deeds in past lives (karmavipāka); the fate of the childless ; sin and expiation (prāyaścitta) ; and so on and so forth. The last one of the questions mentioned above, namely, about the status of Draupadī after the dice game, was from the point of view of the Indian Dharmaśāstra, so difficult that even Bhīṣma, the recognized authority on the subject, when pointedly challenged by Draupadī, confessed in the open assembly his inability to decide the issue. It was a real dilemma, an insoluable problem:

na dharmasaukṣmyāt subhage vivektuṁ/
śaknomi te praśnam imam yathāvat / / (2.60.40 *ab*)

Our epic poets are in fact never tired of reminding us that Dharma is subtle (*sūkṣmo hi bhagavān dharmaḥ*), because its essence is concealed in a dark cavern (*dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām*) .

The most complete and detailed information on these and allied matters is, however, necessary, if one is to act so as not to infringe the provisions of the Aryan Dharma and if he is to lead from its view-point a blameless life, as indeed he must do if he desires victory—lasting victory, final victory, and that too not only on the field of the ordinary battle but in the battle of life. This knowledge is thus of paramount importance to one who wants to secure bliss in this life and in the next, in other words, to every one who is on the quest of the ideal life.

It may be thought that the proper field for this kind of varied and specialized knowledge is obviously the body of technical treatises on the subject of Dharmaśāstra; and we have accordingly quite a large number of very elaborate treatises which are exclusively devoted to the exposition of Dharma, works like the Drarma Sūtras of Āpastamba and Baudhāyana, the Smṛtis of Yājñavalkya, Manu and Bṛhaspati, *Smṛtikaustubha* and others. These excellent treatises are, however, as is common knowledge, far from being very popular works, and with the exception of the *Manusmṛti*, even their names must be unfamiliar to the average layman. In fact, they form the preserve of learned jurists and doctors of law — like my friend MM. P. V. Kane — for whom they are undoubtedly suited and probably also intended. They are sealed books to the man in the street, who fails to derive from them instruction in matters which he ought to know and with which he is vitally concerned. It should be remembered that the knowledge of the rules of Dharma is useful not merely to kings, jurists, and administrators. It concerns every one who is interested in regulating his life according to the dictates of Dharma. For, every man should live rightly and must fight for himself the battle of life. And this battle is ceaseless. It is the most insistent and the persistent of all mundane wars, involving universal conscription.

We may look at the question from the standpoint of the Indian conception of the ends or the goals of human existence, which are said to be four: Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. The last is recognized as the supreme beatific end that can be attained in any particular life by the few. There remain thus only three, Dharma, Artha, and Kāma, which are generally considered in our epic as being worthy of the normal endeavours of every single individual. These goals of human existence (puruṣārthas) are arranged in the descending order of values. Thus Kāma, or the satisfaction of sexual, emotional and aesthetic instincts of man stands lowest in the scale of ethical values. It is not condemned by any means, having a place of its own in the scheme of life, being recognized as a powerful motive urging man to action; but it is subordinated to the other two, Dharma and Artha. It must moreover never be antagonistic to Dharma (*Gītā* 7.11) :

dharmāviruddho bhūtānāṁ kāmo 'smi Bharatarṣabha /

Artha must further be sacrificed to Dharma. Says the *Mahābhārata* : "A wise man has to serve all three. But if all three cannot be attained, he must try to secure Dharma and Artha. And if he has to choose only one from among the three, he must choose Dharma only. A man of middling discipline prefers Artha to the other two. Dharma is however the source of both Artha and Kama."

It will therefore be realized that, according to Indian conceptions, no one can really escape from the imperative need of knowing Dharma in all its aspects. That being granted, how is this vast body of knowledge to be imparted to the man in the street, who has neither the leisure nor the inclination to study the technical treatises on the subject of Dharmaśāstra. A way was found. "No decalogue", it has been well said, "has half the influence on human conduct that is exercised by a single drama or a page of narrative." That is why in our poem the technical formulation of the different aspects of Dharma is invariably accompanied by illustrative apologues and parables, not unlike those which were employed by Gautama Buddha and again after many centuries by Jesus Christ in the course of the sermons and discourses addressed to their followers. These vivid little stories were intended to exemplify the maxims of right thought and right conduct, and to drive in the moral, imprinting it indelibly on the memory of the listener, making the precept an integral part of him or at least of his thoughts. And there can be no question that they succeeded in a large measure in doing so. The high standard of conduct preached here was characteristic of the people among whom were born Gautama Buddha and Mahāvīra Jina, Aśoka and Harṣa, Ramdas and Kabir. That is why it found expression in the epic. And because the epic has broadcast the message, it has in turn moulded Indian character and institutions in a subtle way. The teaching is in part the offspring and in part the parent of that quality which the epic embodies and extols.

This is undoubtedly the explanation of that volume of ethical matter and didactic episodes in the *Mahābhārata*, the *raison d'être* of what HOPKINS has called the " pseudo-epic ", which has tried the patience and soured the temper of many an analytic critic of our Great Epic, who in order to be rid of matter unintelligible and perhaps also unpalatable to them, have dubbed it as "interpolation". But it is no more "interpolation" than the so-called "epic nucleus", which is informed by the same high didactic and ethical purpose. The nuclear epic theme and the intrusive didactic interlude are just two aspects, in different mediums, of one and the same central idea, quite consciously and deliberately expressed in two different ways.

Regarded from this point of view, the so-called "interpolations" of the Āraṇyaka, Śānti and Anuśāsana parvans will be seen to have a vital function to perform and must be regarded as forming an integral part of the original poem in its received form, which is in fact the only form known to us and of which we can be sure. It will thus be realized that not a single line of the didactic matter is lacking in purpose and in organic connection with the whole.

Four subjects were considered by the Bhārgava redactors of our epic as of special importance and worthy of detailed treatment. They are: (1) the duties of a king, the king being the recognized head of governmental machinery which regulates the socio-political structure; (2) conduct in times of calamity, applicable especially to the first two Varṇas of the Indian society, when the ordinary codes of conduct are not applicable; (3) emancipation from liability to rebirth, which is the highest goal of human existence; and finally (4) liberality.

These topics form the subject matter of the great Exhortation, the wonderful exposition of Dharma given by Bhīṣma and reported in the Śānti and the Anuśāsana parvans of the epic. Addressing the dying warrior, Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: "All knowledge, O hero, will expire with thee. It is for this reason that all the princes assembled together have approached thee, to listen to words on duty, on morality. Do thou then speak words of truth, fraught with Dharma and Artha." This great discourse, though divided formally into four parts, Rājadharma, Āpaddharma, Mokṣadharma and Dānadharma, comprises discourses and anecdotes dealing with the most varied topics which are full of deep interest and valuable instruction, emanating as they do from that pillar of Bharata's race, Śaṁtanu's son, who, as the epic says, had not been guilty of a single transgression in this world.

It may further be observed that these didactic interludes in no way disturb the balance of the poem as may be supposed and as has actually been alleged by some modern critics. For, as Pisani has justly pointed out, they have been skilfully used to fill up what he calls "temporal hiatuses" in the story which are bound to occur in a long and detailed narrative covering the period of four full generations of long-lived men. These passages, it will be noticed, have been massed together in the Āraṇyaka and in the Śānti-Anuśāsana parvans : the former in the period of the twelve-years banishment in the solitude of forests and mountain valleys ; the latter in the period intervening between the end of the war and the last great journey of the Pāṇḍavas, which marks the end of the tragic drama. "This distribution," says Pisani, "has not only the scope of not disturbing the course of narration, but also that of helping the reader to pass irrelevant years without striking against too strong a contrast between periods minutely narrated and others rapidly surpassed. In a not different manner Homer introduces often dialogues and episodic matter when he must conceal the flowing of times without noteworthy events." The particular collocation of Smṛti passages has helped to accommodate all the didactic material which the epic poets wanted to put in, without disturbing in the least the architectonic beauty and harmony of the whole. DAHLMANN was therefore perfectly justified in regarding this stupendous work as "Epos" and "Rechtsbuch" *in one,* a work in which the epic story and the ethical matter are skilfully harmonized and perfectly blended, forming one indivisible organic whole.

Let us review the position and take stock of things before proceeding further. The *Mahābhārata* passes as the Epic of the Bharatas, recounting the story of a great war which took place in a distant past — which the epic poets think of as the beginning of the Kali Age, the Age of Iron — between descendants of the great Bharata, a king of hoary antiquity. Hence obviously its name, the *Bhārata* or the *Mahābhārata.* The story describes with elaborate detail the life history of these descendants of Bharata, the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, who are the principal actors in this exciting and tragic drama, along with an account of many of their kinsmen and of yet other kings and priests of those times. It not merely describes with meticulous care the society of those times, but also contains descriptions of the varied and wonderful weapons of offence and defence belonging to the combatants. There are detailed accounts of the negotiations between the two contending parties and attempts at reconciliation of the cousins, which is then followed by a graphic narration of their respective preparations for the war. But there is above all a very minute description — occupying four whole books of the epic — of the thrilling battles which took place between the opposing forces in the course of the devastating war which ended in the complete annihilation of eighteen large armies, in a complete overthrow of the wicked usurpers and re-establishment of those innocent princes who had been deceitfully deprived of what was rightfully theirs. The events are narrated with painstaking minuteness and astonishing realism, so that it is not difficult to believe — as is commonly believed by the people of India — that the events had actually taken place, more or less as described, naturally allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration necessary for artistic effect. Criticism has, of course, in some respects, shattered to pieces the orthodox view that the epic represents a contemporary account of the war and contains the *ipsissime verba* of the actors in that thrilling drama or even of the bards of those times. We have to be content with regarding it as a relatively late product. The poets whose work we have before us are with conscious art depicting a past age, but an idealized past ; a past which, as some one has said, never was a present. It is the normal method of high romance : the method of Walter Scott in depicting the ages of chivalry ; of Tennyson or Morris in writing about the knights of King Arthur.

This is the prima facie view of the *Mahābhārata*, as we might say, the story on the mundane or material plane. But when we look deeper into the work, we begin to realize that it would be a mistake to lay all the stress on the martial aspect of the epic. For, it is speaking to us, almost uninterruptedly, in a very audible undertone, of some entirely different matters. Among other things, it speaks to us — as Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan has so aptly expressed it — "of the vast eternal background against which wars are lost or won and kingdoms perish or survive." As we try to grasp the real underlying significance of the poem, we gradually begin to perceive that there is a high ethical purpose informing the poem and we become aware of a new and important perspective on the ethical plane. The poets seem to be describing great events, but in reality they do not for an instant forget that they are occupied with the history of souls depicting the incidence of their experience and knowledge on the external world. This subtle effect is the result of the fact that the war on the mundane plane has been deepened into a cosmic war between the Devas and the Asuras, symbolical of the idealistic conflict between antagonistic principles, the ceaseless opposition between Good and Evil, between Justice and Injustice, between Dharma and Adharma.

The characteristics of these two opposite tendencies are very clearly realized by the epic poets, being described at length in the sixteenth chapter of the *Gītā,* where they are called the Divine Estate (*daivī saṁpat*) and the Demonic Estate (*āsurī saṁpat*). Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness, liberality, self-restraint, uprightness are among the qualities of those that are born to the Divine Estate. The qualities of those, on the other hand, that are born to the Demonic Estate are naturally the opposite of these. They are briefly described in the *Gītā* as hypocrisy, pride and self-conceit, wrath, insolence and ignorance.

Being thus projected on to a cosmic background, the story of the Bhārata War comes to have a cosmic significance and therefore universal validity. It stands for the conflict of interests between the Aggressor and the unfortunate object of his aggression, between the Tyrant and the subject people over whom he tyrannizes, between the Capitalist and the helpless victim of capitalistic exploitation, between the usurer and the hapless victim of his usury. The perpetually recurrent situations of life with which the *Mahābhārata* deals are in fact as real and as true today as they were ten thousand years ago. And we are urged by the epic to adopt in relation to them, in turn, as circumstances demand, hopeful fortitude, reasoned restraint, benevolent opposition, but above all contemplative aloofness.

Like a true epic, the *Mahābhārata* takes us into a region in which nothing happens that is not deeply significant. A dominant, noticeably symbolic purpose presides over the poem, moulds it greatly, and informs it throughout.

Thus on the ethico-psychological plane, from which we are now viewing the work, the epic universe seems to gyrate round the fixed axis of Dharma — justness and rectitude in human conduct and ritual observance, man's whole duty towards his neighbours and towards God. In other words, on this plane, the epic aims at impressing upon the reader or rather the listener the paramountcy of moral values. Mother Kuntī's parting words of advice to Yudhiṣṭhira may be taken to be the motto of the *Mahābhārata* (B. 15.17.21) :

dharme te dhīyatāṁ buddhir manas tu mahad astu ca /

"Let thy reason be fixed on Dharma. Let thy mind be ever great." This, it will be conceded, is a high enough purpose. But the epic rises to yet greater heights.

Lecture IV

THE STORY ON THE METAPHYSICAL PLANE

The Indian saga, beyond all dispute, is the *Mahābhārata*. Of this saga the main theme — as in all true sagas — is a great war. And it is important to remember that this is a war waged between two families of cousins, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the sons of Pāṇḍu, or the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas as they are called. Mighty warriors, beautiful women, great saints move to and from across the scenes of the drama in a glittering mêlée. We are thrilled by the vow of Grandsire Bhīṣma (*Bhīṣma-pratijñā*) to renounce the throne, to renounce marriage, to renounce in fact everything that makes life worth living, — merely in order to gratify a whim of his aged father. We are moved to tears by the piteous but futile appeals of the heroine, Draupadī, to be saved from the infamy of being disrobed, in a public assembly, by her own licentious and vindictive kinsmen. We are held spellbound by the fury of the blood-curdling battles in which opposing chieftains smash each other's chariots, kill each other's horses and elephants, fling against each other showers of sharp arrows, hack and slay each other.

The epic poets do not rest with staging for us this tremendous drama and letting us watch the performance merely as spectators. They lead us behind the scenes, so to say, showing us round and telling us all about the actors in the tragic drama we have been watching. They let us look at the show "from the inside", as it were, giving us a new and a vital view-point, affording a deeper insight into the play. The actors, we find, are representatives of two ideal communities, a moral community in which the gods have taken part as heroes and pious individuals ; and an immoral — or rather an un-moral — community which it is their object to destroy. The war we saw being staged before us appears now as the state of tension between two fraternities which have existed from time immemorial and which continue to appear in ever new guises, in different places and at different times. In this way the epic poets try to familiarize us with the cosmic conception of the eternal conflict between Right and Wrong, between Good and Evil, between Justice and Injustice. The epic poets let us guess that we ourselves, without knowing it, are in fact actors in this ever-lasting cosmic drama and that we have been taking sides in the conflict and playing our own appointed parts. After reading the book we feel as if the *Mahābhārata* had in reality never ended. It seems to us as if it is going on now, at the present time, at the present moment ; and that it will go on also for all eternity.

By precept and example, we are gradually won over by the epic poets to the side of Truth, Justice, Morality and Righteousness. These imply Dharma. And Dharma, we are assured, over and over again, will give us all that we can legitimately wish for in this life. Victory depends upon Dharma (*yato dharmas tato jayaḥ*). Dharma can promote economic well-being ; it can lead to the satisfaction of even the sexual, emotional and artistic instincts and aspirations of man. Then why not follow Dharma ?

dharmād arthaś ca kāmaś ca sa kimarthaṁ na sevyate /

When we have reached this stage, which is on the ethical plane of perspective, there is however a sudden change in the orientation, which alters altogether the picture of the conflict between the Devas and the Asuras, and leads into deeper mysteries of life, beyond the dichotomy of Dharma and Adharma, beyond Good and Evil.

The consideration of these deeper mysteries will be taken up in its proper place. In the meantime I want to draw your attention to the fact that, according to Indian conceptions, the Daivī and the Āsurī creations are not exactly what we understand by Good and Evil in the ordinary sense of the terms. There is in the Indian conception none of the ultimate dualism that has marred so much of the thought of other religions and philosophies, no God and Devil standing as ultimate irreconcilables. Indian thought in the highest form is far more scientific and rational, in so far as both the Daivī and the Āsurī creations are said to spring from the same ultimate source, and in the end both merge into it.

Good and Evil are thus conceived not as irreconcilable opposites, but rather as complementary processes. They may be described as the up-going creative side which is from within (*pravṛtti*), and the down-going destructive side which is from without (*nivṛtti*), both emanating from and finally merging into the Ultimate Reality, into that power from which everything proceeds. The two opposites combine to form a whole, which synthesizes and integrates them into a single transcendent unity. This is true not only of the Asuras and Devas, of Adharma and Dharma, of Wrong and Right, of Evil and Good, but of various other phenomena in nature and man. The universe is indeed one, in the sense that all things proceed from the same source so that everything is related to everything. But here is the rub. *Polarity informs the universe.* Its evolution and even existence therefore depend upon interaction between two opposite poles, an absolutely natural and even inevitable tug of war between opposites. "The reality is universal," as Hegel puts it, "which goes out of itself, particularizes itself and opposes itself to itself."

This transcendental reality is, as you know, in Indian philosophy, called variously as Brahma, Ātman, or Paramātman. And Indian philosophers have always insisted that this Ātman, the Ultimate Reality, which is *immanent* in and also *transcends* the illimitable diversity of the phenomenal world, must be seen, heard, thought upon, and deeply meditated upon, though it is ordinarily speaking beyond the senses, though even the mind returns without having reached it. And in the

Mahābhārata we see the crystallization of the attempts made by Indian poets to understand, formulate and illuminate this illusive, paradoxical Reality, to describe the indescribable, so to say, attempts which led the inspired epic poets to the creation of one of the most characteristic products of Indian genius, which was destined to influence profoundly not only the literature and art of the subsequent generations, but also their life and thought.

To understand this lofty creation, we must however retrace our steps a little and go back to the Upaniṣads, that fountain-head of all Brahmanical speculation and philosophy. In their search for Truth the first bold step taken by the Upaniṣadic seers was to synthesize the plurality of Vedic gods into one Ultimate reality. This synthesis was almost simultaneous with the location of the Supreme in the secret recess of one's own heart :

tam durdarśam gūḍham anupraviṣṭaṁ
guhāhitam gahvareṣṭhaṁ purāṇam /
adhyātmayogādhigamena devaṁ
matvā dhīro harṣaśokau jahāti / /

The Upanisadic seers had performed the miracle of translating bodily the heavens from beyond the skies into the cave of man's own heart. Thenceforward the old worlds (*lokas*) and the old gods (*devas*) became to the initiated merely levels of reference and symbolic entities, which are neither individuals nor planes (in the theosophic sense) but states of being realizable within oneself, within you and me. The "heart" of man thus became the alter, the sanctuary, the place of devout pilgrimage, the world and heaven and hell, — in one word, the universe. With one bold stroke man had shattered the unbreakable bonds that had bound him to life outside himself. By the fiat of his own unconquerable will, man made himself free and totally independent — of reality. Man became — what the psychologists call — an introvert ; and the Almighty became a lonely prisoner in the heart-cell of the "Yogi."

To galvanize this Internal Ruler (Antaryāmin) again into activity, the epic poets have made the daring — and, to judge by the results, an amazingly successful — experiment of leading the King out of his Dark Chamber into broad daylight in order to expose him to the gaze of his disconsolate devotees, who were pining to behold him, to hear his voice, to see him act a part in his own drama. And this Internal Ruler, as you must have guessed, is no other than Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the adored of many devoted hearts and the anathema to the modern critics of the *Mahābhārata.*

"A bizarre figure!", exclaims the critic. "A Yādava chieftain who looks and acts uncommonly like a mortal — and a very ordinary mortal at that — and who has the incredible effrontery to say that he is a god! A cynic who preaches the highest morality and stoops to practise the lowest tricks, in order to achieve his mean ends! An opportunist who teaches an honest and god-fearing man to tell a lie, the only lie he had told in his life! A charlatan who declares himself to be the god of gods, descended from the highest heaven for establishing righteousness on earth, and advises a hesitating archer to strike down a generous foe who is defenceless and is crying for mercy!"

It was inevitable that this complex character should be totally misunderstood by western critics of our Great Epic, who generally agree in seeing in the supreme god of the Bhāgavatas only a "tricky mortal," as HOPKINS put it. The majestic sweep of this subtle Indian conception has left the Western critics nonplussed and dumbfounded. And as we are in the habit of reading our ancient books through the spectacles balanced on our noses by our Western *gurus,* most of whom have yet to show any real understanding of them, we are beginning to acquire a very distorted view of these books. It is high time that we look from our own standpoint at these ancient scriptures of ours, which have served our people for some millennia as their guides in life and their spiritual solace, make them our own, translate them into action and re-live their truth.

It would not be right, however, to blame the Indologists for this judgement of theirs; because we must realize that no one can understand a truth which is beyond his powers of comprehension. Śrī Kṛṣṇa in any case seems to have anticipated his critics. Has he not said (*Gītā* 9.11) : "Fools scorn me when I dwell in human form" (*avajānanti mām mūḍhā mānuṣīṁ tanum āśritam*). And again he says : "Among thousands of men, but one strives for perfection ; even of the perfected that strive, but one knows me in truth" (*Gītā* 7.3) :

manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye /
yatatām api siddhānāṁ kaścid māṁ vetti tattvataḥ / /

How shall we then try to understand him ? Śrī Kṛṣṇa is a mortal and yet not a mortal. We know his caste, his family, his parents, the circumstances of his birth ; and still he maintains that he is unborn ; yet again he says that many births of him are passed and he knows them all. It is also clearly recounted in the epic that one day as he had laid himself down to rest under a tree, a passing hunter pierced his heel with a shaft and he died. And yet we are told that he was immortal, eternal, infinite. He also seems to love the Pāṇḍavas and to hate the Kauravas, for whose destruction he continually works, or plots. And yet as it has been said he avows that all beings he regards alike ; not one is hateful to him, not one beloved.

He is a paradox, a riddle, to say the least. And what is so very strange in that ? Is not life a paradox, a riddle ? From the standpoint of science — physical science — is not the maintenance and reproduction of a living organism a standing miracle ? The biologist Haldane says so, and he has probably very good reasons for saying so. And yet we can do nothing for it. We can only accept it, and witness the miracle being performed before our very eyes day after day, hour after hour.

The double character of Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives rise to apparent contradictions in his words and actions, which have been the despair of modern interpreters of the *Mahābhārata*. The only solution they have been able to discover is to cut him out altogether from the picture, to leave him out of the drama — his drama — in the name of historical truth and higher criticism. But as we shall see this heroic remedy is hardly called for in the present case. Let us try to undersand the poem as it is, without any athetization.

Before we proceed to investigate the deeper meaning underlying the epic, let us consider one other question. What is the reaction of the Indian people themselves — for whom after all this poem has been composed — to the contradictions pointed out by modern critics of the *Mahābhārata?* Do they perceive these contradictions, or do they not? And if they do, how do they account for them? Obviously they must. But it seems to me that the immediate and untutored grasp of the essential unity of the universe, which is ingrained in the Indian soul and which only finds doctrinaire and rational expression in the works of Indian philosophers, helps out the believing Indian when he is faced by a stark contradiction in the behaviour of his idol. He is not ruffled by these inconsistencies, because apparently by automatic mental adjustment he instantly reaches the plane of thought on which the mind of the poet is working. He is, as it were, furnished by nature with a bifocal stereoscopic apparatus which instantly combines the twin views of the God who has become Man and the Man who has become God, — views taken at slightly different angles — into a single, perfectly focussed image of God-Man or Man-God, with complete effect of solidity, reality and perspective. It is only the modern critic who, starting from entirely different modes of thought, standards of conduct, and norms of expression, approaches this stupendous product of Indian genius suspiciously, hesitatingly, superciliously, — when he comes across anomalies, in the character and behaviour of Śrī Kṛṣṇa,—which are more apparent than real,—finds his progress impeded by a blank wall of total incomprehension and comes sooner or later to a dead stop.

The unsophisticated Indian, who brings faith to bear on the subject, believes simply Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be an *Avatāra* of Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa (who to him are the same, being only different aspects of the same Supreme Being) derives comfort and consolation from the belief or conviction that as Śrī Kṛṣṇa aided in the past the righteous Pāṇḍavas, so would He help his devotees now in this age in their own trials and tribulations of life, if they lived righteously, with full faith in the Saviour; because, has he not said that to protect the good and to destroy the wicked and to establish normalcy, He comes into being in age after age :

> *paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām /*
> *dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya saṁbhavāmi yuge yuge / /*
> (*Gītā* 4.8)

But even the sophisticated Indian need not go quite empty-handed, if he reads this great book with the care and attention which it deserves, considering that this precious work has been preserved with infinite trouble, and cherished with deepest love and reverence by his ancestors for at least twenty centuries, if not more, and handed down to us as a great legacy. But of one thing we can remain assured. To dissect this epic and to throw out from it one after another such parts or passages as we happen not to like is definitely not the right way to understand this epoch-making book.

How shall we then solve the riddle of Śrī Kṛṣṇa ? We shall solve it as soon as we solve the riddle of life, which is the riddle of our own self, our real Self, in other words, our reality on the metapsychical plane as opposed to our empiric reality. The picture and the characterization of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is in fact a challenge to man to know and to understand his Self. In proportion as he understands his own Self, will man understand the Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata*, for he is no other than one's own true Self (*Gītā* 10.20) :

> *aham ātmā Guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitaḥ /*

"I am the Self, O Guḍākeśa, dwelling in the heart of every being."

This equation, as we shall see later on, becomes the basis of a symbolism far deeper and far more subtle than the allegory of the Devas and Asuras, whose part-incarnations the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas are supposed to be, — a symbolism which you will find gives an entirely new dimension to the story. In fact it is just this conception of Śrī Kṛṣṇa which takes the *Mahābhārata* right out of the category of the ordinary ballads, bardic lays, heroic poems, national epopees and so on, and places it in a class by itself, giving it a universal value. This is no doubt the secret of the unbounded popularity, —

nay, adoration and reverence — which the work has always enjoyed throughout Indian antiquity, and the high admiration which it has evoked even in modern times among many foreign students of the epic.

This symbol, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, does not of course stand by itself, as in fact it cannot, and is associated with a number of other subsidiary symbols. Consequently the bearing of many of the episodes of the *Mahābhārata* and the full import of even the *Bhagavadgītā* will never be understood unless the meanings of these symbols are kept steadily before one's eyes.

It is not sufficient, for instance, to think of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa merely as a Pāṇḍava hero and a Yādava chieftain. In the story, as we have it, Arjuna (who, though not the eldest, is the most important of the Pāṇḍavas) and Śrī Kṛṣṇa are consistently represented as incarnations of two ancient sages, Nara and Nārāyaṇa. Nara obviously stands for Man, man in the abstract, or as the epic says Narottama, Man *par excellence,* the Superman, Nārāyaṇa — however the word came to have that meaning : we do not want to lose ourselves just now in etymological speculations—stands for the Supreme Being, the Ultimate Reality, the source from which everything proceeds. Thus the pair Nara-Nārāyaṇa stands for Man and his God.

What the relationship between Nara and Nārāyaṇa is, is hinted at in an episode related in the Udyogaparvan : the episode of King Dambhodbhava, itself a symbolical story related as an antidote to arrogance and pride. King Dambhodbhava, the offspring of pride, had an overweening conceit of his own powers and when he was told that he was no match for Nara and Nārāyaṇa, who were living as ascetics on the Gandhamādana mountain in their hermitage at Badari, he proceeded thither with his army and challenged them. They endeavoured to dissuade him, but he insisted on fighting. Nara then took a handful of straws and, using them as missiles, flung them at the intruders, who were disturbing the tranquility of their peaceful retreat. Those harmless looking missiles, filling the air, pierced the eyes, ears and noses of the assailants, until Dambhodbhava fell at Nara's feet and begged for peace. While

Nara was repelling the wanton attack of King Pride, Nārāyaṇa, who was even greater than Nara, sat looking on apparently unmoved.

This episode is clearly a plebeian version of the classic parable of the two birds, eternal friends, seated upon the same tree — symbol of the body — of whom one (jīvātman) eats the sweet fruit, while the other (Paramātman) sits, in a pleased mood, silently looking on. This Upaniṣadic story is naturally also symbolic, a parable intended to visualize the dual soul — human and divine — incarcerated in one body; or in metaphysical language, the empirical and the transcendental self subsisting in one tabernacle.

Now, this much seems clear to me. Whoever Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī, was and whoever the Pāṇḍava Arjuna was in real life, the epic poets view Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa simultaneously as the jīvātman and the Paramātman. Indeed to the epic poets the symbols appear to have become the reality, and the real persons merely shadows.

The establishing of this equation is, I can assure you, no attempt on my part to rationalize the story of the *Mahābhārata,* or to impart to it a mysterious or theosophical colouring. The ancient commentators are clear about it. The unsophisticated Indian, whose property the epic is, knows it instinctively. It is sheer stupidity on the part of the modern critic to have missed the obvious, — because the epic itself is also very explicit about it.

If now you are prepared to concede that the epic poets consistently view Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Paramātman and Arjuna as the jīvātman—and that, mind you, without detriment to the existence of some real historical personalities bearing these names and playing some part in the actual human drama on the stage of real life — if you are prepared to concede that much—then you will agree, I think, that the battle which the jīvātman has to fight is evidently the battle *par excellence,* the great battle of life, by which I mean not indeed the miserable "struggle for existence" of the evolutionist, but the battle royal with one's own self. It is this battle with—what may be called for want of a better name—one's lower self, the empirical ego, along with its adjuncts of desires and passions, hate and greed, envy and malice, combining to form a large and formidable army of stalwart and desperate opponents. Says the wise Vidura in his advice to Dhṛtarāṣṭra on the merits of self-conquest (5. 34. 53, 55) :

yo jitaḥ pañcavargeṇa sahajenātmakarśinā /
āpadas tasya vardhante śuklapakṣa invoḍurāṭ / /
ātmānam eva prathamaṁ deśarūpeṇa yo jayet /
tato 'mātyān amitrāṁś ca na moghaṁ vijigīṣate / /

We have in the epic abundant evidence to show us that the Indian people had by then learnt to regard self-conquest as a necessary element of moral grandeur. It had become in fact the culminating ideal of the nation. Typical of this mood is the account of the last great journey of the Pāṇḍavas, which shows Yudhiṣṭhira conquering the temptation of sacrificing a faithful follower of his for the sake of the joys of heaven. Nearing Mount Meru, all except Yudhiṣṭhira, finding themselves unable to maintain the Yogic state, fall on the ground leaving Yudhiṣṭhira alone with a dog which had followed him all the way from Hāstinapura. When the aerial car sent by Indra arrives to take Yudhiṣṭhira to heaven, the charioteer refuses to admit the humble dog, who was apparently taboo in Indra's heaven, but Yudhiṣṭhira also refuses to enter heaven without his faithful dog. The large number of stories of that type recounted in the epic go to show that the Indian imagination had reached a point where it could conceive of nothing in the universe transcending in greatness man's conquest of himself. That was the demand that Buddhism, with its exaltation of character and detachment, had taught the Indian people to make of manly men. Great was the renunciation of life by the monk ; but greater still, according to the epic, is the acceptance of life and the renunciation of self-interest, egoism or self-hood ; and that is not possible without self-conquest.

The sum and substance of all such stories and parables is that, as taught by the *Gītā* (6.6), your real enemy, as your real friend, is within you, not outside :

bandhur ātmātmanas tasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ /
anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatruvat / /

"Self is the friend of him by whom the self has been conquered; but the self shall be, in its enmity, like a true enemy, towards him of uncontrolled self." Accordingly, in the *Gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa constantly exhorts Arjuna to kill first the enemy within the gates, within himself :

> *pāpmānaṁ prajahi hy enam jñānavijñānanāśanam* /
> Gītā 3. 41 cd.
>
> *jahi śatruṁ mahābāho kāmarūpaṁ durāsadam* /
> Gītā 3. 43 cd.

"Kill the sinful one that destroys both knowledge and experience . . . . O thou strong of arm, slay thou the enemy, in the shape of desire, so hard to reach."

If you pursue steadily the indications afforded by the symbolism underlying the lineaments of Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa and dive yet deeper into the plot of this great drama, you will discern as though in dim twilight unmistakable traces of an extensive but carefully veiled allegory underlying the whole narrative, a very delicate tracery of thought reflected, as it were, in the subconscious of the poets and finding an elusive expression — now refined and subtle, now clumsy and, to us, grotesque—in the characterization of most of the *dramatis personae* as well as in the delineation of many of the scenes.

The chief features of the symbolism I am thinking of are indeed quite clear and indisputable and have been pointed out long ago by ancient Indian commentators, and, apparently, even independently observed by many earnest and sympathetic students of the epic in modern times. The symbolism is admittedly sketchy, the details, as in all good poetry, being left, probably intentionally, to be filled in by the creative imagination of the sympathetic reader. It is like the *Dhvani*, tone, in the best Indian poetry, where the denotation (*abhidhā*) gives no sense or at best an imperfect sense, and we are obliged to find a transferred sense (*lakṣaṇā*). This transferred meaning is in the best samples of the art more striking and even more important than the expressed, but must be obtained by repeated study and deep cogitation. And that is exactly the case with the *Mahābhārata*.

It is not difficult to determine the symbolical role of Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, since, as was remarked above, the epic itself is very explicit in its statements about them. Let us now proceed cautiously to inquire into the significance of some of the other important characters of this psychological drama, about whom the epic poets have not been quite so explicit.

The subject is difficult, and I am not sure that I see my way clearly through it. But I will try to give you the results of my thoughts. Let me add that the precise form of explanation you are prepared to accept is, to my mind, of little moment. What I just now want to do is to impress on you the fact that there *is* an inner significance behind the events so dramatically narrated in the *Mahābhārata*, a meaning which is of far greater interest and consequence than the epic story on the mundane plane ; or even for that matter on the ethical plane. It is true that most modern scholars are inclined to reject all such interpretations as mere subjective reading into the text of meanings that were never intended by the author ; but such a view is entirely superficial. Such criticism is particularly inapplicable to our epic since it itself declares as its object the exposition of all the four aims of life : dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa. The last item admittedly is concerned with metaphysical entities. We are therefore justified in expecting in the *Mahābhārata*, directly or indirectly, light on the eternal verities of life.

Let us then look more closely into some of the other main characters of the drama. Next to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in transparency stands Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king of the Kurus, about whose significance there cannot be much doubt. He represents clearly, as Shri Krishna Prem has pointed out in his book on the *Gītā*, the empirical ego, the lower and transient personality, blinded by egoism and foolish infatuation, as the *Gītā* puts it, *ahaṁkāra-vimūḍhātmā* (*Gītā* 3. 27). There is a subtle pun on the word Dhṛtarāṣṭra itself, signifying as it does " one who has seized the kingdom ", naturally by force or cunning. Although he arrogates to himself the title of king, yet his rule over the kingdom is merely a nominal one, for the real power lies with his vicious sons, just as the human personality which so proudly says "I" is but the sport of a continuous succession of involuntary desires and passions which are the real rulers of the body it calls its own. Observe also that Dhṛtarāṣṭra is subject in a marked degree to that persistent and unshakable feeling of selfish separateness which is the distinguishing feature of the self-centred ego. This separateness shows itself for instance in the pathetic sense of attachment exhibited by Dhṛtarāṣṭra towards his own vicious sons, when the recall of the Pāṇḍavas is urged by the wise and impartial Vidura. Says Dhṛtarāṣṭra :

asaṁśayaṁ te 'pi mamaiva putrā
Duryodhanas tu mama dehāt prasūtaḥ /
svaṁ vai dehaṁ parahetos tyajeti
ko nu brūyāt samatām anvavekṣya / /

"Undoubtedly they also are my sons. But Duryodhana is sprung from my (own) body. Who, if he see impartially, would now say : 'Give thy body up for the sake of another'?" Another striking characteristic of him is his constant vacillation between good and evil impulses, to which I have drawn attention on a previous occasion. Dhṛtarāṣṭra listens to good advice in a peevish and doubting mood, promises half-heartedly to act accordingly, and then goes and does deliberately the very opposite, but repents his weakness and ends the episode by casting the blame on destiny, the last resort of the weak mind. Having eased his conscience in that way, he is again ready to listen to more advice and repeat the whole cycle again. This, as you must realize, is precisely what the weak ego does in respect of the things it dislikes. If you now study carefully from this view-point the characterization of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you will realize that he is a perfect symbol of the vacillating ego-centric self, pandering to its own base passions and weaving its own evil designs, engrossed in self-esteem and bent on self-aggrandization, alternately gloating over transient gains and moaning over inevitable losses.

If that be granted—and I think there cannot be much doubt about the correctness of the explanation I have given—then it would follow without need of any rigorous demonstration that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, Duryodhana and his ninetynine brothers, symbolize in their aggregate the brood of egocentric desires and passions like lust, greed, hatred, anger, envy, pride, vanity, and so on, to which the empirical ego is firmly attached and to which it clings desperately. But it is especially lust, anger and greed (*kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhaḥ*—*Gītā* 16.21), which are the ruling passions, and we find them strikingly combined in the chief of the Kaurava brothers, king Duryodhana.

Amidst the paraphernalia of pomp and luxury, the blinded ego, bearing the insignia of power and authority, leads the miserable existence of a criminal confined in a dark solitary penitentiary, being watched over and bullied by his jailors, the domineering and dominating passions. A slave of his boisterous and unruly emotions, the shrunken and enfeebled ego lives on merely to placate his masters, deriving a small amount of fleeting and vicarious enjoyment when the passions are gratified and falling back into despondency when they are frustrated.

In view of the facts set forth above, you will, I think, not find it difficult to believe that when the epic poets represent the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas together with their allies, who comprise in their aggregate the body politic, as engaged in an internecine civil war on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, they are very plainly hinting at the psychological conflict *within man* of the good and evil propensities, comprising the motive forces of the human body or the human personality. Or, to put it differently, the Bhārata-yuddha on the holy Kurukṣetra is a projection, on the background of generalized history, of the psychological conflict within man himself. You will realize the propriety of the name Kurukṣetra in this connection when you recollect that kṣetra is just the technical name of body in the Sāṁkhya-Yoga terminology of the *Gītā* (13. 1):

idaṁ śarīraṁ Kaunteya kṣetram ity abhidhīyate /
“This body, O son of Kuntī, is called the kṣetra (field)”.

Let us, however, return to the consideration of the question of the symbolism underlying some of the main characters of this epic drama. I have shown above that while Śrī Kṛṣṇa

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and Arjuna symbolize the Paramātman and the jīvātman, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his hundred sons stand for the empirical ego and its entourage of desires and passions, which cling round the blind ego and make up the totality of its little world. Now psychologists will tell you that not even the most vicious and degraded of human beings is without a conscience, that is, without an innate consciousness whether his actions are morally right or wrong. In Indian philosophy there is no precise equivalent for the word conscience. It operates with the concept of *buddhi*, which is a cogitative organ and the chief counsellor of man in ordinary life, enabling him to discriminate between good and evil, right and wrong. The blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra has such a counsellor in his own brother, the wise Vidura, who is always by his side, remaining with him to the end of his days. Dhṛtarāṣṭra knows that by consulting him he can determine under every circumstance the right course of action (2. 51. 5), because he is dharmārthakuśala (5. 34. 1), adept in questions concerning dharma and artha. To beguile a sleepless night, Dhṛtarāṣṭra gets Vidura to discourse to him when Vidura reads him a lengthy lesson in ethics containing many maxims, which has come to be known as *Vidura-nīti*, advising the misguided king to concede the just claims of the Pāṇḍava brothers. In that royal family, says Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura was the only one who was esteemed by the wise (5. 33. 15) :

> *Śrotum icchāmi te dharmyaṁ paraṁ naiḥśreyasaṁ vacaḥ/*
> *asmin rājarṣivaṁśe hi tvam ekaḥ prājñasaṁmataḥ //*

Dhṛtarāṣṭra appreciates the wisdom of Vidura's words and consults him constantly, but characteristically never follows his advice, which is naturally most unpalatable to him, as he is acting under the guidance of his sons who are all in all to him. You will agree with me, I think, when I say that this character bears as clearly as possible the physiognomy of Buddhi, the one-pointed reason, and this is borne out by the terms *mahābuddhe* and its equivalents which are used by Dhṛtarāṣṭra in addressing him. (cf. 5. 35. 1).

Another character which shows distinct traces of characteristic moulding is Grandsire Bhīṣma. Since Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that when Bhīṣma dies all knowledge will die with him (B. 12. 46. 23) and he advises Yudhiṣṭhira to question the dying stalwart on matters concerning Dharma especially, Bhīṣma seems to represent tradition, the time-binding element in human life and society. It is recognized that one of the most difficult things to obliterate completely is tradition or memory. Its death may be said to be in its own power, as Bhīṣma's was; because every attempt to kill it gives it only a new lease of life. It subsides of itself when its purpose is achieved. And this is true of the memory of the individual as of race memory.

Let us return for a moment once more to the two great characters of our epic, Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. We have ascertained that Arjuna is the symbol of the jīvātman, not indeed of the ordinary mortal, the ego-centred personality, but the Superman (Narottama), who by practice of self-control and discipline, has purified himself, conquering the baser part of his own nature. He is, in other words, a *jitātman*, one who has conquered his self, master of his body along with all its appurtenances, and not its slave, as the average man is. When in doubt or difficulty, Arjuna constantly seeks the advice of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and follows his advice religiously, regardless of consequences to himself and to others. A very clear indication of what the epic poets thought about Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa is to be found in their identification of the two characters, which is often implied and sometimes even clearly expressed in our epic and which must have puzzled you, if you have thought about it. Thus in the *Gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa mentions Arjuna among his *vibhūtis* or special manifestations. He is Vāsudeva, he says, of the Vṛṣṇis, and Arjuna of the Pāṇḍavas (*Gītā* 10.37):

Vṛṣṇīnāṁ Vāsudevo'smi Pāṇḍavānāṁ Dhanaṁjayaḥ /

More surprising still is the specific mention by Śrī Kṛṣṇa on another occasion that he and Arjuna are one and the same and absolutely indistinguishable from each other (3.13.40):

ananyaḥ Pārtha mattas tvam ahaṁ tvattaś ca Bhārata /
nāvayor antaraṁ śakyaṁ vedituṁ Bharatarṣabha / /

Now this is obviously an absurd statement, if taken literarlly and considered as a proposition of everyday life, since identity could not go further and yet the epic itself recounts individually the life of two distinct and separate personalities. If it is an expression merely of intense friendship or love between two comrades or kinsmen, it is a preposterous exaggeration, which we are unable to appreciate. But the statement is explicable — in fact it is literally true and indisputably appropriate — from the monistic point of view which insists on the essential identity between the Ultimate Reality and its manifestation. Arjuna appears different and acts differently from Śrī Kṛṣṇa merely because his *essential* identity on the transcendental plane is realized neither by Arjuna himself nor by others around him. We may put the same thing in a different way and say that Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is playing a dual role : as Śrī Kṛṣṇa he is guiding the Pāṇḍavas and as Arjuna he is fighting for them. Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa of course knows this and he wants Arjuna also to know it. In substance says the Bhagavān to Arjuna, "Know thyself, O Arjuna. I am the Parabrahman. And there is no difference essentially between you and me. Who are you then ?" *Tat tvam asi Śvetaketo,* in the words of the Upaniṣad. The Bhagavān is in other words coaxing Arjuna, the Nara, or rather the Narottama, the Superman, to tear off the mask he has been wearing and see himself as he in reality is. He will then realize that he is not different from the Bhagavān : there is no duality. That is why Kṛṣṇa is one of the names of Arjuna, why they are called Kṛṣṇau, why Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that there is no difference between them, — if you can penetrate the thin veil of Māyā which separates them, if you can throw out of gear the mental kaleidoscope which breaks up the One into the many.

Lastly we come once more to Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself, who as I have tried to show is primarily a symbol of the Supreme Being, the Superself, the Ultimate Reality, the Changeless First Principle, free from the operation of Māyā, and therefore beyond Good and Evil. He is serene, liberal, tolerant, free and inperturbable. He is manifestly a God who has become a Man. How little difference, if any, would there be between God who has become Man and Man who has become

God. Must it not be a reversible equation ? Otherwise the *Avatāra* theory would be meaningless and merely a vapid piece of mystification. Is it blasphemy to say that Man could become God ? I think not. Does not the Bhagavān himself show how Man could become God ? "Freed from affection, fear and wrath, full filled with me, devotedly attached to me, by discipline of knowledge cleansed, — many have attained to my state of being, that is, *have become as I am* (*Gītā* 4.10) :

vītarāgabhayakrodhā manmayā mām upāśritāḥ /
bahavo jñānatapasā pūtā madbhavam āgatāḥ / /

This is tantamount to saying that there is no unbridgeable gulf between Man and God. To be sure, godhood is a difficult ideal, but in Indian conception one not impossible of achievement. Thus it will be seen that Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is declared to be a manifestation of the Supreme Being, that is of the Superself, is at the same time a symbol of the hope and destiny of mankind.

I have indicated above very briefly the symbolic significance of some of the principal actors in this drama on the metaphysical plane, and I do not want to spend more words on the subject. As I told you at the outset, the precise form of theory or explanation which we accept is of little moment. What is of importance is to realize that there is an inner significance behind the events so realistically narrated in the Great Epic of India, just as there is an inner significance behind all acts, conscious and unconscious, of man himself ; and yet more generally there is an inner significance behind all the phenomena of life, even though we may not be able to define and understand precisely that significance. I may add that all great works of Indian art and literature, be it then the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* or the plastic image of Naṭarāja, — they are all infused with the idea of penetrating behind the phenomena to the core of things, and they represent but so many pulsating reflexes of one and the same central impulse towards seeing unity in diversity, towards achieving one gigantic all-embracing synthesis.

Let me emphasize here with all the power at my command that it is only from this one point of view that you will be able to understand and interpret the *Mahābhārata*, and that all attempts to explain it merely as an evolute of some hypothetical epic nucleus are merely examples of wasted ingenuity. The Bhṛgus have to all appearances swallowed up the epic nucleus such as it was, and digested it completely; and it would be a hazardous venture now to reconstruct the lost Kṣatriya ballad of love and war. Conditioned by its origin, our poem also has an element of love and war, but they are not the loves and wars of the old type. They have been transfused, metamorphosed and wrought into deep symbols of lasting value and vital interest, combined into an intricate transcendental cameo, telling us how to relate our lives to the background of the reality in which they are cast, teaching us to live our lives, so to say, under the shadow of eternity.

I have given you the symbolic significance of some of the principal characters in this psychological drama. With this key in your hands, it will not be difficult, I think, for you to decipher many of the hieroglyphic pictographs that had puzzled you before, and thus to obtain an insight into the deeper meaning of this great book and of its message to mankind.

Let us look then once again at some of the familiar old epic tableaux which you have known from your childhood. We shall take first the tableau representing Duryodhana and Arjuna sitting on either side of the sleeping Kṛṣṇa as narrated in the Udyogaparvan (5. 7. 5):

> *tau yātvā puruṣavyāghrau Dvārakāṁ Kurunandanau /*
> *suptaṁ dadṛśatuḥ Kṛṣṇaṁ śayānaṁ copajagmatuḥ //*

They were waiting to advance their respective claims for help, each hoping to secure his favour for himself to the exclusion of the other. When he wakes up, however, Śrī Kṛṣṇa surprises them by declaring that though he himself would not take up arms in the impending war, as he was related to both parties, he was going to help both in an equal measure, only in different ways, leaving the choice to themselves. To one claimant he will give his armies; the other he will serve in person unarmed. Is this, I ask you, a conceivable situation? Can you imagine, for instance, a modern politician giving such an answer to two opponents who have both come to canvass his help at the same time? Or were the old politicians different from their successors today? Is that not really very strange behaviour? It is, if one insists on regarding this as a true newspaper report — which is all that one cares for nowadays — of what happened at a meeting of three ordinary politicians. When you treat it, however, as a symbolic tableau and project it back on the transcendental plane, you will find that it is a very accurate report of what is going on *behind the scenes* and one full of deepest import and interest.

What do we find on the metaphysical plane? The Daivī and the Āsurī forces, symbolized here by Arjuna and Duryodhana, both derive their power from the same primeval source, which appears to be quiescent but is not inert, and is here symbolized by the *sleeping* Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That qualityless supreme source from which everything proceeds, who has been variously styled the Superself or the Oversoul, whom we conceive to be merely existence, consciousness and bliss, does not of course participate directly in men's squabbles. This Superself is conceived as the silent witness of the play of his Māyā. This play of his Māyā is not, however, a purely mechanical affair, like a marionette show, as one is likely to suppose. It is clearly hinted that the universe is governed by an element of freedom. Life is constantly placing alternatives before us and asking us to choose. Each one of us chooses and gets what he desires, though he is generally — or rather almost invariably — dissatisfied afterwards with what he has got and would not hesitate to deny that he had desired some of the things which he got in his life, though these are but the natural and inevitable consequences of his own voluntary actions. Duryodhana wanted power, which he gets in the shape of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's invincible army, which later gets annihilated, being deprived of their leader, in the course of the war and proved powerless to prevent the catastrophe which overtook Duryodhana. Arjuna, on the other hand, wanted just divine guidance (*yato Kṛṣṇas tato dharmaḥ*). Arjuna chooses it and gets it for the mere asking, and becomes in the end the conscious and willing instrument in the hands of the Divine Charioteer, who pilots his chariot on to final victory (*yato dharmas tato jayaḥ*).

Let us inspect another tableau, so familiar to all of you, that of the Philosopher on the Battlefield, Śrī Kṛṣṇa sitting in a war-chariot with Arjuna by his side and discoursing leisurely on metaphysical problems. A bizarre picture it seems, if we see in it only a warrior and his charioteer seated in their war-chariot occupying the centre of the battlefield and conversing about Prakṛti and Puruṣa, Sāṁkhya and Yoga and what not, when they ought to be discussing plans of war and questions of strategy. The grotesqueness of the scene vanishes, however, the moment we remove their masks and see who the persons participating in the discussion are. The key symbol is the chariot, a symbol which occurs in the Upaniṣads, in the *Mahābhārata,* and even in the dialogues of Plato. In the Upaniṣads the individual soul is described as the rider in the chariot of the body, while Buddhi is the charioteer. This has been improved upon in the *Gītā,* where the individual soul is still the rider, but the role of the charioteer has been taken over by the Supreme Self, who is beyond Buddhi, symbolized here as Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This, as far as I can judge, is the only way of explaining the introduction of a lengthy philosophical discourse on the battlefield, just prior to the commencement of hostilities, which would otherwise remain a grotesque absurdity. For, if the Bhārata War is viewed as a war against the enemies of the Self, then it is in the fitness of things that it should be preceded by a full-length discussion *on the nature of the Self*. The precise spot selected in the poem for the discourse is also not without significance. Man is for ever poised between two opposing tendencies, between the up-going creative process (pravṛtti) and the down-going destructive process (nivṛtti), and he has to make his choice between them. When the perplexed mind knows not where duty lies, the self has only to commune with his own Self, since true knowledge in these matters is to be found within the self. It is plain that since we ourselves are part of the universe, descended from that power from which everything proceeds, we must contain within ourselves some of the inspiration sufficient for our individual needs, *could we only become aware.*

En passant I may refer to the grotesque explanation that has been given by some foreign critics of the *Mahābhārata* that the idea of getting Śrī Kṛṣṇa to prompt the heroes to commit certain supposed excesses in the Bhārata War was to exonerate the heroes by calling in as a last resort the direct command of the deity to justify what to moral apprehension was unjustifiable. "For," says HOPKINS, voicing the opinion of the analytical criticism of the *Mahābhārata*, "if Vishnu commanded a hero to do this, who could question the right or the wrong." This is sheer nonsense. The idea of the epic poets was evidently too subtle for HOPKINS, whom it seems to have eluded completely. What the poets wish to say is this. Learn to "contact" with the Self. When pleasure and pain are the same to you, when you become indifferent to the success or failure of your little schemes, when you lay no claims to the fruits of your action, then — and then only — the Self will guide you personally through life, counselling you at each step, — metaphorically speaking, will drive your chariot for you. Then be true to your Self and do as he bids you. The question here is of the Self, with a capital S, of whose existence HOPKINS appears to have had not even a glimmering. If you take refuge in your self, that is, if you are true to your Self, your real Self, who is naturally the same as the Supreme Self, you will commit no sin. Says the *Gītā* (18.66):

sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja /
ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ / /

"Abandoning all dharmas, come to me alone for refuge; I will release thee from all sins; grieve not!" This "I" who is speaking is your own Self, with a capital S, because the visiting card of the speaker reads: *ahaṁ ātmā Guḍākeśa* (*Gītā* 10.20). This you will realize is a very different proposition from putting the guilt on the pet god and being oneself free.

Who or what is this Self anyway? Promptly — almost indignantly — there is flashed on the screen of our mind, in reply to that question, the picture of tawdry shrivelled personality, that flaccid bundle of desires and hopes, fears and wraths. We are not now deceived, for we know this apparition to be an imposter, the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who has usurped the sway over the kingdom of the body, only to become a puppet of his vicious offspring. This blind imposter would be a useless and unsafe guide, even under ordinary circumstances; how much more so in times of stress and storm, of deep perplexity and real danger!

We have to dive deeper within ourselves to find the true Self, the King of the Dark Chamber, who abides in the heart of every being (*Gītā* 18.61):

īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṁ hṛddeśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati /

But it is not so easy to discover His Majesty. Effort is necessary and perseverance: practice of self-control and concentration of mind. The Yogi must preserve a mind entirely detached from the things of the world. He should choose a place fit for meditation removed from other men. There he should sit in an upright position, steady and motionless, and by keeping his eyes fixed on the tip of his nose, he should ensure the steady concentration of his thoughts. Thus sitting the Yogi must so tranquilize his mind that neither fear nor lust may move him. All earthly thoughts will vanish, and one thought only — the thought of the Superself — will dominate his mind. Moderation must be the watchword of the daily life of the Yogi. But this Yoga practice is not by any means an end in itself; it is merely the means to an end. Its object is just to be able to achieve yoga or union, to "contact" with the Self, the real Self of man.

The history of this Self—which is also our self—goes back to the creation of the universe, and beyond to that power which has spread out this all (*yena sarvam idaṁ tatam—Gītā* 2. 17). Many births of the Self are passed (*Gītā* 4. 5), all of which the Self knows but not we. We have no reason to suppose that anything has happened contrary to the urge and the need of the Self. One can therefore fulfil best the purpose of one's life by regarding oneself as the chosen instrument of the Self to effect some particular purpose (*nimittamātraṁ bhava Savyasācin—Gītā* 11.33). In fact all our suffering appears to be due to the building up of a strong consciousness of our existence as a separate entity and to our frantic efforts to cling to that personal separateness and identity. One must transcend that separateness and unite oneself to that Power from which one proceeds — and every thing proceeds — to know oneself one with the universe, which is also one's self.

But one imagines one is already united with oneself. In fact we believe that we can be disunited with ourselves only after our death. This belief Indian philosophers have always held to be blank ignorance or rather the opposite of true knowledge (*avidyā*).

Arjuna, who fancied that he knew his self, was labouring under the same delusion. And the *Bhagavadgītā* embodies the effort on the part of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa to educate him, or rather to re-educate him, by disabusing his mind of various misconceptions and instructing him in his duty. And this is done not by giving him lessons in Dharmaśāstra or any other śāstra, but by merely teaching him to know his Self, to "contact" with the Self, for that, as the Indian philosophers have always maintained, is the source of all true knowledge.

* * *

THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

No discourse on the *Mahābhārata* would be complete without a reference to the *Bhagavadgītā*, the real kernel of the Great Epic. I have been talking round it a great deal, but let us now turn for a moment to it directly.

The *mise-en-scène* of the Glorious Song of the Blessed Lord is, as you know, the battle between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, the occasion is the reluctance of Arjuna to fight with his own kinsmen and the elders (gurus) in the opposing army. It was a case of a psychological conflict. To be or not to be: that was the question. For his part, he says, he prefers to renounce worldly life, to walk out of the conflict, rather than be the cause of killing his kinsmen and destroying his own family. This is a negative view of life, which is clearly not approved by his Self, whom he thought he knew so well, but — as it turned out — did not know in the least. Therefore his real Self faces him on the threshold of the conflict and makes him self-aware, that is, reminds him of that identity which

Arjuna had forgotten. When he does know his true Self, as he does after Śrī Kṛṣṇa had instructed him in the mysteries of the Self, Arjuna finds that many persons whom he had formerly regarded as his kinsmen, to whom he felt firmly attached by the strongest ties and without whom life would not be worth living, were indeed his enemies whom it was his duty to kill. Projected back on to the psychological plane, this means that he must fight and annihilate his enemies comprising the entire make-up of his lower self, the whole paraphernalia of his illegitimate desires and passions, his private likes and dislikes, all the false ideals and traditions to whose guidance he had unthinkingly submitted, all sorts of relationships he had contracted in his separate existence. He had clung to them desperately, thinking that life would be impossible without them, because he had wrongly regarded them as an integral part of his being, which was just the *proton pseudos* of his existence.

The Bhagavān knows well enough that Arjuna's mood of despair is but a passing emotion and that his nature will prevail, compelling him to fight, as he was destined to do. Only he wants Arjuna to know the *raison d'etre* of the fight. It was not merely a question of the justice or injustice of the cause for which he was fighting. Political exigencies have no real value on the metaphysical plane. The mind of man or his intellect can be depended on to make right of wrong and wrong of right, to suit his self-interest. Man is judged ultimately in the secret recess of his own heart, and the final arbiter is the Self of the dispassionate man, who has conquered himself and eliminated self-interest. And if a man's action is certified as right by his Self, it is unquestionably right as far as he is concerned, and there is no power on earth or in heaven which can make it wrong. By prevarication or subterfuge he can deceive no one but himself, because all that he thinks or does not think, all that he desires or does not desire, all that he does or does not do, is indelibly impressed on his own personality, and becomes merely the basis of further efforts to realize the Self.

Arjuna the Superman has been constantly exhorted by Śrī Kṛṣṇa to become a Yogi, which means nothing more or less than that he should be one who has attained conscious union (yoga) with the Supreme Self. When we analyse human life, we find that it has three—and only three—aspects : intellectual, (or ratiocinative), reactive, and emotional. Consequently his union with the Superself must be likewise threefold or three-dimensional : intellectual, reactive and emotional, which the *Gītā* calls Jñānayoga (or Buddhiyoga), Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga.

Of these the first, Jñānayoga, is union with the Self by knowledge. It consists in the intellectual conviction arrived at by ratiocination — or still better by intuition — that the universe is one, that everything in the universe is interconnected, that one cannot escape relationship that unites us to everything that exists, nor from the continuity which joins us to the past, the present and the future. It also includes the intellectual realization that one's real interests and the universal interests coincide exactly. Diversity of phenomena is admitted, but the Jñānī sees unity in diversity, which is naturally a difficult mental or intellectual feat and which is the real test of true knowledge. Hence this is said to be a difficult path to tread.

The second yoga is Karmayoga, which is the union with the Self by physical action. As a result of it all action is performed for the sake of the Self, that is, the Superself, and such action is uninfluenced and unaffected by what may collectively be termed the profit-motive. It is characterized by a certain dexterity — one might say, a certain knack — in performing actions that enables one to cast off the "binding" power of action, in other words, to prevent a recoil, — a result which is achieved by dedicating one's life to the universal aim, in other words, by regarding oneself as an agent or instrument in the hands of the Superself and dedicating to him accordingly the fruits of all actions as they accrue.

The third and last yoga is the Bhaktiyoga, which is union with the Superself by devotion or love. It manifests itself as the emotional delight in being united with the Self, from whom one has been divorced during one's selfish separate life, and in co-operating with him for the universal aim. It is characterized by accepting the universe with an enthusiastic gladness, by accepting it not only with one's mind, with one's reason, but with one's whole being. The Yogi recognizes that reason alone is not an adequate instrument with which to encompass the universe and therefore substitutes for it unquestioning devotion to the service of the Self, whom he mentally pictures to himself, from habit, in an anthropomorphic form as the Lord (Īśvara).

Since the universe is infinite and the Self pervades everything, it follows that any one of these three paths pursued diligently will lead to the same ultimate goal, the one and only goal. But following any single one of these three paths to the utter exclusion of the other two would inevitably lead to a wilful strangulation of the personality of man, involving unnecessary repressions. The complete Man is one who attains to conscious unity with the Superself in all aspects of his being, intellectually, reactively and emotionally, integrating all the sides and aspects of man. Knowing intellectually the universe to be one and seeing unity in diversity, the Yogi will act, uninfluenced by the profit motive, with his whole being for the universal aim, in his particular sphere of action, whatever it be ; and also he will experience emotional delight in doing so. He reaches a state of self-consciousness, of wholeness, in which his knowledge and experience have so become part of himself and his intuition is so awake that he is spontaneously in harmony with his surroundings. He has realized that his own interests and the universal interests coincide absolutely with no gap between them. Such a man accepts without question his place in the social order and fulfils the functions allotted to that place, because he realizes that he has attained it by his own past endeavours and his own conscious or unconscious desires.

This is in a nutshell the *Gītā* doctrine in its essentials, stripped of its archaic phraseology. It implies an ideal, simple to preach and hard to practise, the vow of the Perfected Man, which is as keen as the razor's edge, as the Indian poet says. And this ideal pervades the entire *Mahābhārata*.

Is the *Gītā* an interpolation? The question has no meaning in the light of the explanation I have given you of the structure and the meaning of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Gītā* is in fact the heart's heart of the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Mahābhārata* is a sort of a necessary commentary on the *Gītā*. It has been well said that no decalogue has half the influence over human conduct that is exercised by a single drama or a page of narrative. The philosophy of the *Gītā* had to be expounded by application, if it was to be of any use to the mass of the people for whom it was primarily intended. And that is just the *raison d'etre* of the *Mahābhārata*. It visualizes the teaching of the *Gītā*, by projecting the ideal on to the background of generalized history.

This was somewhat of a digression, but an inevitable one, as no discourse on the *Mahābhārata*, however short and summary, would be complete without at least an indication of the trend of the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

* * *

Let us then go back to the consideration of the story on the metaphysical or transcendental plane. I was trying to show you that there is a subtle symbolism of the metaphysical order underlying the story. I drew your attention to the fact that when the epic poets speak of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, they are almost always thinking of the Paramātman, whom we have called the Superself. Arjuna equally clearly represents to them primarily the individual self, who is deemed by the Superself a pupil, sufficiently advanced in self-realization to be initiated into the final mysteries of the threefold yoga, which is the attainment of conscious union with the Superself on all the three planes of human existence. But since Arjuna is explicitly stated to be merely a manifestation (vibhūti) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa or is in other words merely another aspect of him, the Guru and the Śiṣya are in this instance thought of being identical. We have here in other words the splitting up of one personality into two characters, Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. From this point of view the *Gītā* is purely and simply a document of self-analysis or psycho-analysis by oneself. Here the cosmic mind, symbolized as Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa analyses by introspection with the *Gītā* the conscious mind, symbolized as Arjuna, determines and eliminates its complexes and synthesizes it.

The central symbolism of the Superself and the individual self, which is of a patent and indisputable character, gets transferred to the minor characters as well of this psychological drama, and all the other important characters also function, to a certain degree, symbolically. Many of the scenes of this drama which at first sight appear to us unintelligible or at least uncouth and grotesque acquire deep significance when they are treated symbolically and projected back on to the metaphysical or psychological plane of thought.

Now I realize that these descriptions must remain rather ineffective when unaccompanied by detailed illustrations. But such detailed illustrations would clearly take us quite beyond the limits of the present lecture series. I will only mention that this is no new discovery of mine, but that such psychological and metaphysical explanations of the characters and the plot of the *Mahābhārata* are scattered in the ancient Indian commentaries of the epic, the best known among them being the *Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya* of Ānandatīrtha, the great Madhvācārya, who has clearly stated in that work that the story of the Great Epic has been related in such a way as to convey also an allegorical meaning :

> *evam adhyātmaniṣṭhaṁ hi Bhārataṁ sarvam ucyate /*
> *durvijñeyam ataḥ sarvair Bhāratam tu surair api / /*

Ānandatīrtha explains the symbolism by giving the psychological concepts corresponding to many of the important characters, differing partly from those given by me. But as I have said, the details which have been left intentionally vague by the ancient poets are really of little moment. The important thing is that it was traditionally recognized that the Kurukṣetra is at the same time the battlefield of the different emotions and passions in the heart of man, the holy battleground of the eternal war between the higher nature and the lower nature of man.

* * *

RETROSPECT

In the course of these lectures it has been my endeavour to demonstrate that there are three clear perspectives from which the *Mahābhārata* can be viewed. There is the matter-of-fact view-point. On this material or mundane plane, it is the lively story of a fierce war of annihilation said to be waged between two families of cousins, which ends in the victory of one of the claimants to the throne, a story which in all probability is not entirely an invention but has some historical basis, which is however, entirely in the background. On the mundane plane, from end to end, the main interest of the poem is held and centred on character. Next there is what may be called the Dharmic view-point. On this ethical plane, the war is regarded as a conflict between the principles of Dharma and Adharma, the Pāṇḍavas standing for Dharma, the Kauravas for Adharma, they being the incarnations of the Devas and the Asuras respectively, and the war ends in the victory of Dharma (*yato dharmas tato jayaḥ*). There is, thirdly and lastly, the transcendental or metaphysical view-point. This aspect of the story is only suggested and gains in interest and importance by being that, having all the power and beauty of a chiaroscuro from the brush of a master painter, which produces its ethereal effects by the power of suggestion. On this transcendental plane, which is the view-point beyond Dharma and Adharma, beyond Good and Evil, the epic develops what may be termed the philosophy of the Self, which may properly be regarded as an attempt at a synthesis of life. In doing this, the epic poets stage a war between the Higher Self and the lower self of man, symbolized by the family of cousins, who are fighting for the sovereignty over the kingdom of the body. In this conflict the Superman (Arjuna) under the guidance of the Superself (Śrī Kṛṣṇa), acquiring insight into the nature and character of his own self and realizing the fundamental identity between the individual self and the Superself, cleaves with the sword of knowledge his own ignorance, manifested in the shape of all the illegitimate desires and doubts, passions and prejudices, ideas and idiosyncracies, which had crystallized round him in the course of his separate existence and which he had falsely considered as innately and intimately belonging to himself, as an inalienable and indivisible part of his own personality, his own individuality, his own being :

> *tasmād ajñānasaṁbhutaṁ hṛtsthaṁ jñānāsinātmanaḥ /*
> *chittvainaṁ saṁśayaṁ yogam ātiṣṭhottiṣṭha Bhārata / /*
> *Gītā* 4.42

Projected on to the material or mundane plane, these various ligaments which bind the self are made visible, embodied as relatives, teachers, elders, and friends, whom Arjuna sees from his central position, ranged on one side of the Kurukṣetra, and whom he finds so difficult to face and to kill. His illusion destroyed, the individual self becomes ready to obey unhesitatingly the behests and to accomplish joyously the work of the Superself as his chosen instrument.

Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa always exhorts Arjuna to become a Yogi. The Yogi intellectually realizes that the universe is one, that he cannot escape from the relationship that unites him to everything that exists, nor from the continuity which joins him to the past, the present and the future. The Yogi, who is self-aware, is characterized by equipoise, accepts the universe with an enthusiastic gladness, whole and as it is, realizing the immense possibilities which it holds. He accepts it not only with his mind, his reason, but with his whole being. The way of the Yogi is the hardest, demanding as it does greatest love, courage, freedom, and self-mastery.

The key-note of the philosophy of the *Mahābhārata*, which is identical with the philosophy of the *Gītā*, is *samatva*. It is the essence of Yoga, the heart's heart of Yoga, so that in the *Gītā* samatva is identified with yoga (*samatvaṁ yoga ucyate* — *Gītā* 2. 48). The meaning of samatva can be seen only by careful observation of its use, — a point we cannot go into here. It means something like equablesness, harmony, balance. Balance of what ? It is evidently balance of personality that is meant. The man who is *sama* clearly does not try to fly from the world. Worldly life brings a multitude of marvellous experiences, most precious, not to be missed at any cost, but not to be utterly absorbed in. The way of life of the Yogi, who has attained samatva, affects his whole personality, bringing into their right and balanced relationship the functions of reason and will and emotion. He walks *evenly* among the beauties and the perils of the world — like Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa in our epic or his human counterpart, Arjuna ; you have to think of the two as one — feeling the love, joy, anger and the rest. In fact he runs through the whole gamut of emotions, and through it all he preserves his balance, equipoise, aloofness, — like a scientist watching objectively the results of the ever new experiments he arrranges, able to control the materials but not the results.

To put it yet more simply, the *Mahābhārata* embodies the spirit of Yogic Idealism, that is, of feeling the value and wonder of life and being desirous of making it a better thing ; and further, with that end in view, to combine the spirit of intense enjoyment with a tempering wisdom, perfect control and natural equipoise, — going into seas of experience steered by samatva. That is active renunciation, the *leitmotiv* of the *Mahābhārata*. The doctrine is enunciated formally in the *Gītā,* and illustrated in a lively and picturesque manner in the story.

The epic poets, we find, are using every means in their power to expound, illustrate and popularize what we might for short call the Philosophy of the Self, a lofty philosophy of ethical autonomy, unparallelled for its boldness and comprehensiveness, and to convey their message of moral duty and hope, with emphasis on the application of these principles to the problems of daily life.

When we realize these facts, questions as to the historicity of the polyandrous marriage of Draupadī, or the precise ethnic affinities of the Pāṇḍavas, or the exact date of the Mahābhārata War, of the origin and development of the epic—these and other favourite topics of academic wrangling — lose some of their glamour and cease to engross us. They are legitimate questions no doubt and not totally devoid of interest. But we must realize that while disputing about them, we are still on the periphery of this mighty work, which is primarily concerned with finding a solution to the problem of evil in life, nay, to the problem of existence itself.

On account of the rapidly shifting planes of perspective of the vast canvass on which the epic poets operate in developing their three-dimensional theme, the construction of the story has naturally become very complex, and its form has given rise in modern times to many amusing misconceptions and to some grotesque theories. But I can assure you that there is no serious contradiction or inconsistency in the work, as you may have been led to believe from a cursory perusal of it. I hope I have succeeded in showing you that the *Mahābhārata,* which may have started as an epic, has certainly *not* ended in becoming a chaos, as OLDENBERG imagined. It would be a pardonable hyperbole to say that it has ended in becoming the cosmos, as it very modestly says of itself :

yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kvacit /

" What is in this work may be found elsewhere, but what is not in this work is to be found nowhere " !

The chaos which modern critics think they see in the Great Epic of India is but a reflex of the state of their own mind and not in the work at all, which on the other hand is a mighty pulsating work, clothing in noble language and with pleasing imagery a profound and universal philosophy, a glowing and rhythmic synthesis of life.

APPENDIX

English rendering of the German quotation on page 1 :

" Besides the main story there were veritable forests of small stories and besides, numberless and endless instructions about theology, philosophy, natural science, law, politics, practical and theoretical knowledge of life. A poem full of deeply significant dreamings and surmisings, delicate poetry and school-masterly platitudes full of sparkling play of colour, of oppressive and mutually jostling masses of images, of showers of arrows of endless battles, clash after clash of death-despising heroes, of over-virtuous ideal men, of ravishing beautiful women, of terrible-tempered ascetics, of adventurous fabulous beings, of fantastic miracles — full of empty flood of words and wide, free, peeps into the order of the course of the world."

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Compiled by N. A. GORE

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Compiled by N. A. GORE

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